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Sol Ginger,

THE GIANT TRAPPER;

OR,

The Flower of the Blackfeet.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "THE TWO DETECTIVES," "ABE
COLT, THE CROW-KILLER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE EXPEDITION INTO THE BLACKFOOT COUNTRY.

On a bright afternoon in the month of June, almost all the inhabitants of the frontier post known as Fort Benton, and located on the upper Missouri, gathered on the bank of the river to watch the approach of the first steamer of the season, through from St. Louis.

On came the "Mountain Belle," the A 1 "stern-wheeler," which, for many weary weeks to her impatient passengers, had plowed her way through the turbid waters of the great Missouri, the "Mad River of the North," on her upward passage to Fort Benton, the head of navigation on the Missouri.

A motley crowd were collected on the bank, waiting the approach of the steamer. Here and there among the throng might be seen the blue uniforms of Uncle Sam's boys, the garrison of the fort; side by side with them, a swarthy red-skin, decked out in hunting-shirt and leggings of deer-skin, or wrapped in a coarse red blanket, although the sun's rays were pouring down with torrid fierceness; the woolen-shirted emigrant, seeking for life and fortune in the Far West; the hardy frontier-men, the "guides" of the prairie wilderness—in fine, all the classes that go to make up the life of our far western villages, were congregated on the bank of the river.

The passengers of the steamer, too, had gathered in little knots, on the forward parts of the boat, and were very eagerly surveying the scene before them, the starting-point to many of a new life. Here they were to cast aside the comforts of civilization, and dare the waste of prairie wilderness, the home of the Crows, the fierce marauders of the north-west; the land of the unconquered Blackfeet, the tribe who can bring with ease

three thousand mounted warriors into the field.

It has got to be the fashion among the "special correspondents" of the daily newspapers, who make "kid-glove" journeys to the frontier, to write sneering accounts of the red-skins—of "Mr. Lo," as they term the savage; to say that they want courage, and that they could be easily crushed out, should the government bring its strong hand to bear upon them. These reliable writers pick out some drunken, vagabond Indian, hanging around the settlements, his senses steeped in bad whisky, and they hold him up to the gaze of the public as a sample of the American Indian! Bah! away with such deception!

Come, messieurs, who are termed "special correspondents," but who, one half the time, could be more aptly termed "special story-tellers"—buy a Henry rifle, a good navy revolver, one of Colt's fine weapons, a hardy Indian pony,

and take a gallop with me, three hundred miles north-west from Cadotte's Pass, up the valley of the Flathead river, right into the country of the Blackfeet—the nation that as yet have never yielded a single inch of their soil to the tread of the white man's foot—a tribe that laugh to scorn the power of the "blue-coated chiefs," as they term the United States soldiers. In this trip we may encounter danger; nay, more, we shall encounter it; we shall owe our lives to the speed of our horses, the sureness of our shots, and the distance that a good repeating rifle will carry.

And Monsieur Correspondent will return, convinced that the American Indian will fight after all, and that he can not be "wiped out," to use our frontier phrase, as easily as is generally supposed. But to return to our story.

On the hurricane deck of the Mountain Belle stood two men, side by side. They were dressed roughly—big boots drawn on over their

pants, and broad-brimmed hats pulled down over their brows in the western fashion. But, their hands and faces, though bronzed by the rays of the sun and tanned by the prairie winds, yet showed no marks of toil. One of the two was a man no longer young; fifty years had probably passed over his head, yet time had touched him but lightly. His dark brown hair, cut short, and brushed back from his temples, showed no silver locks. His face was massive and full; a broad forehead and square-cut chin, the chin half hid by a short, brown beard, gave it weight and firmness; his eyes were gray, bright and full; his glance keen and penetrating. He was one of those men who command respect even from strangers. His companion was a young man, not over twenty-five, a handsome, dashing-looking fellow; jet-black hair curled in little ringlets all over his shapely, well-formed head. His eyes were black, like his hair; a small mustache and imperial graced his lip and chin; the whole face had a laughing, devil-may-care look about it, as though its owner felt disposed to take the world as it came, and make light of trouble.

These two men, though now apparently fast friends and holding close converse together, before that morning had never spoken to each other, although they had been travelers together from St. Louis. A chance observation from the elder to the younger in relation to the journey being nearly at an end, and their acquaintance began; hence we find them now together.



"Make for the corral—the gate is unfastened—turn the horses loose—you know the rest!"

"Do you stay in Fort Benton?" asked the elder of the two, who was called Roderick Wright, of the younger, who answered to the name of Harry Courtney.

"No, I shall push forward to the mines, as soon as I can find a train to journey with."

"Have you decided what mines you will try your fortune at?" asked Wright.

"No, it's all one to me," carelessly answered the other. "I shall go with the first party that start, no matter which way they journey. You see, I'm a rolling stone, and it don't make much difference where I settle down."

"Have you ever been in this part of the country before?" asked the elder of the two.

"Yes, once. A year ago I went through to Olympia, by the upper trail, with a party of emigrants. I went for the fun of the thing then. I had plenty of money and wished to see the country; but now—" and here the speaker hesitated, and for a moment a cloud came over his face.

"Well, what now?" asked the other, looking into the young man's face curiously; then noticing the hesitation of Courtney, he spoke abruptly: "I beg pardon for my questions; I have no wish to pry into your affairs, and—"

"Oh, it's not that!" cried Courtney. "I've nothing to conceal, but—well, I may as well tell you all about it. I don't know how it is, but some way or another I've taken a liking to you; and, besides, it relieves a man's mind to tell his troubles—not that I've had much trouble in my life. Six months ago, my father, who was a commission merchant in St. Louis, died very suddenly, and on winding up his affairs I discovered that, instead of possessing an estate of fifty or a hundred thousand dollars, my father was bankrupt at the time of his death, and left me nothing. Being an only son, and my mother dying in my infancy, my father had made a pet of me—brought me up as a gentleman; so, at his death, I was thrown upon the world helpless. The old lawyer who settled up my father's estate, and who had known me from my boyhood, asked me what I was going to do? Of course I answered that I hadn't the remotest idea. He then offered me the loan of a hundred dollars, and suggested that I had better take the first boat for Fort Benton, and try my luck at the mines. I accepted the offer with thanks. My story's ended, and now you know why I stand here to-day on the hurricane-deck of the Mountain Belle, bound for the gold mines and a fortune."

"Your history is a good illustration of our American life—up to-day and down to-morrow," returned Wright; "but it's a strange coincidence—"

"What?" asked Courtney.

"Why, if I understand you rightly, you stand here to-day on the deck of the Mountain Belle without a clear idea where you are going or what you are going to do."

"Yes, exactly," answered the young man.

"Well, I'm in the same fix," said Wright, with a quiet smile.

"Indeed!" cried Courtney.

"Yes, I don't exactly know where I'm going or what I'm going to do, yet at the same time I have a clearly-defined plan in my head, by means of which I expect to make, at the least calculation, upward of fifty thousand dollars."

The young man gazed at the speaker in astonishment.

"That's a large sum," he exclaimed.

"Yes, but I expect to make it sure, and I've only got a few hundred dollars to work on. I said I didn't know where I was going; when I said that, I meant I didn't know *exactly* where I was going, for I do know the direction." Here the speaker pulled out of his pocket a small map of the Western States and Territories. "See!" he said, placing his finger on the little black spot marked Fort Benton, "do you notice the pencil-mark leading from the fort?"

Courtney glanced at the map. A small line, evidently traced by a lead-pencil, led from Fort Benton west by south, crossed the Rocky Mountains through Cadotte's Pass, then went directly west until it struck the south fork of the Flathead river, went a little south of the river, and there stopped. At the end of the line a cross had been made, and the words "Elk City" written.

"Yes," responded Courtney. "I see the line. It follows the trail to Olympia, but stops at Elk City."

"Right. I follow that trail, and I, too, stop at Elk City; but where I go after that, I don't exactly know, except that it will be northward, and into the country of the Blackfeet."

"And is it in the Blackfoot country that you

expect to make your fifty thousand dollars?" asked Courtney.

"Yes," answered Wright, with a quiet smile.

"I get the idea!" exclaimed the young man, suddenly. "You know of some gold mine up there that has not yet been worked, and out of that mine you intend to make your money."

"You are partly right and partly wrong," answered Wright. "I have never been in this section before, and I do not know of any gold mine; yet I know of a certain something, in the Blackfoot country *somewhere*, that, if I can only find and carry to St. Louis with me, will be worth to me, when there, fifty thousand dollars."

"I can't guess your riddle," said the young man, after a moment's thought; "so I give it up, but I wish you success in your undertaking."

"What do you say to going with me?" asked Wright.

"What, go with you?" questioned Courtney in astonishment.

"Yes. You have said that you haven't any settled plan as to what you will do; join me then; I need just such a man as you, for the effort for the treasure I am about to steal from the Indians will probably be resisted to the death by every red devil that claims kindred with the Blackfoot nation."

"There is danger, then?" asked Courtney.

"Plenty of it; we shall risk our top-knots every hour after we are fifty miles northward from Elk City," answered Wright.

"But, if you succeed, you gain fifty thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Courtney, after a moment's pause, "it's worth the risk."

"And if I succeed, and you join me, of course I'll give you ten thousand dollars," said Wright, quietly.

"You will?" cried Courtney, in amazement.

"Yes; is it a bargain?"

"You bet!" as a Californian would say," cried Courtney, extending his hand.

"You will join my expedition, then, after this something, worth fifty thousand dollars?" asked Wright, taking Courtney's hand.

"Yes; I'm with you to the death!" answered Courtney; "though what you are going to find up in the Blackfoot country worth fifty thousand dollars unless it's a gold mine, I can't guess."

"Never mind; I know well what I seek," said Wright, "and you may rest assured that I am pretty sure of succeeding, else I should not risk my life."

"Do you and I form the whole party?" asked the young man.

"Oh, no!" said Wright. "I know nothing whatever of the Indian country and very little of Indian fighting, of which we shall probably have plenty before we get through with our expedition. I intend to procure a couple of guides, men who know the upper region and are used to the Indian ways. Our mission must succeed by cunning, not by force; therefore we need skillful guides who can pilot us through, right into the Blackfoot country and yet keep us out of the way of the Indians."

"Your idea is a good one; our party will be a small one then!"

"Yes; four or five only, not more; two or three guides will be sufficient—careful, prudent men. I'd like to get hold of some old trapper, some shrewd old fellow, who knows the country thoroughly."

"By Jove!" cried Courtney, I know the very man."

"You do?" exclaimed Wright.

"Yes; an old fellow I met when I was through here about a year ago."

"Who is he?"

"They call him Sol, the Trapper; he's a quaint-looking old fellow, stands about six feet high and has the longest pair of legs that I ever saw on mortal man. In fact, I believe the Indians call him 'Longlegs'; he's a quiet, civil old codger, a great contrast to the usual blustering frontier-man."

"He's the man, then, I judge, for our purpose," said Wright.

"Yes, I should think he would suit."

"Does he know the Blackfoot country?"

"Like a book," answered Courtney. "He's a trapper, as his name signifies, and his field of operations is up along the Flathead river and its branches."

"He's not a prairie-guide?" asked Wright.

"No; we tried to get him to guide our party across to Olympia last year—"

"And he refused?"

"Yes; he has scruples about shedding blood

—something singular in these frontier-men, who generally value an Indian's life with that of a mad-dog. He refused to go with our party because the Blackfeet were then on the war-path against the settlements, and he said that we were a large party and bloodshed could not be avoided, and he didn't wish to have any man's blood upon his soul if he could help it."

"Isn't the man a coward?"

"That's exactly what some of our party asked, but one of the guides whom we had engaged to go with us laughed at the idea. To use his own words, 'Old Sol could whip his weight in wild-cats any day in the week, when he got started.' As I take it, it's a whim of his not to shed human blood, white or red, if he can live without it."

"And yet," said Wright, thoughtfully, "if he traps on the Flathead river he must encounter the Blackfoot Indians, for it is in their country."

"Very likely," returned Courtney; "but he's probably cunning enough to keep out of their way."

"He's the man then for me, if he'll only consent to go with us."

"I think he'll go, provided we assure him that we want to avoid encountering the savages if possible."

"Of course," responded Wright, "we must steal our treasure; but if the treasure refuses to go we must carry it away by force."

"If the treasure refuses!" cried Courtney, in amazement. "The treasure you speak of, then, is alive and has a voice in the matter?"

"Yes; but the will or voice of the treasure will have little weight with me, once it is within my power," said Wright, gazing at his companion with one of his peculiar baffling smiles.

"Well, I must confess I don't understand what it can be!" said Courtney.

"Have patience, and by the time we strike the Flathead river, you shall know my plans as well as I do myself."

"I suppose I shall have to rest satisfied with that assurance."

"But, are you certain that we shall be able to find this Sol, the Trapper, on our arrival here?" questioned Wright.

"Very little doubt about that; it's just about the time he brings in his peltries, and if he hasn't arrived yet, all we have to do is to wait for him."

"But suppose he has come and gone?" asked Wright.

"No fear of that; he generally lays off a month or so after each trip for rest. I think we shall be certain to find him."

"I hope so," answered Wright, "for, from your description, he's the very man I want."

"I think he'll fill the bill; but see, we're making a landing." And as he spoke the steamer ran its bow on the shore, and the loud whistle ringing out clear on the prairie air, proclaimed the arrival of the first boat through from St. Louis.

The passengers soon mingled with the crowd on the bank, the news from the East was eagerly asked for and the newspapers brought by the boat quickly seized by the impatient throng.

As Wright and Courtney descended from the hurricane-deck and entered the main saloon, they paused for a moment in front of the bar of the boat, where a thirsty throng were eagerly drinking, taking the raw whisky down with true western gusto. At a little distance from the drinkers stood an Indian, wrapped from head to foot in a coarse red blanket, while a battered white hat crowned his head. The red-skin surveyed the thirsty imbibers with an envious air. Evidently he panted for the "fire-water," which his face and gait plainly told he had drank too much of already.

"Let us inquire of one of those fellows if old Sol is in," said Courtney.

"Very well; do so."

Courtney approached a rough-looking fellow in a dirty flannel shirt and a slouch hat, who had just tossed down a glass of whisky, of the "tanglefoot" brand, and was smacking his lips at the flavor of the fiery beverage.

"Can you tell me if Sol, the Trapper, is in town?" Courtney asked.

"Stranger, you've got me!" exclaimed the man addressed. "Never heard tell on him. I don't live round this hyer ranch any way. I'm just in from the Missouri trail."

Courtney felt a hand laid upon his shoulders. Turning, he confronted the Indian in the white hat and red blanket.

"How!" said the savage, in a deep, guttural voice, rendered hoarse by whisky.

"Well?" said Courtney, impatiently.

"Mudhole—big chief—heap fight—big drink

—give chief fire-water—rum—want to see Old Sol—s'pose you come, you see!" And the savage, without waiting for a reply, immediately led the way, with an uncertain, heavy step, down the stairway.

"Shall we go?" asked Courtney of his companion.

"Yes; he evidently knows where the trapper is to be found."

So, down the stairway after the drunken Indian who had proclaimed his name to be "Mudhole," and had asserted his right to be a great chief, went Courtney the adventurer, and Roderrick Wright, the man with the iron will, who sought a living treasure, worth fifty thousand dollars, in the country of the Blackfeet.

CHAPTER II. THE GIANT TRAPPER.

THE savage led the way over the gang-plank to the shore. Wright and Courtney followed. The bank gained, the Indian paused for a moment till the two whites came up.

"White chief find Longlegs—give Indian rum—ugh?" asked the chief, eagerly.

"Yes," answered Wright; "go ahead."

"Mudhole big chief. S'pose you come." And on went the Indian, while the whites followed in his track.

The red-skin led the way up the bank through the town, past the fort, and finally stopped at a small whitewashed shanty, that stood apart from the other houses on the outskirts of the village. Arriving at the door of the shanty, the savage stopped.

"Old Sol wigwam—ugh—rum!" and the savage extended his hand.

"Call him," said Wright, suspecting that the Indian had misled them, and promised what he was unable to perform, in order to obtain the coveted rum.

"Ugh! Chief no like Old Sol! Big stick—wallop Mudhole when chief drink rum. Rum good—stick bad—chief no like stick, heap!"

"It is evident that this Indian is a hanger-on to Old Sol, and that the trapper thrashes him when he indulges in whisky," said Courtney.

"It would seem so; but, the fellow may be lying," replied Wright.

"Give Indian rum?" questioned the savage, impatiently.

"Hullo!" broke in a savage voice, and the door of the shanty opened suddenly, disclosing to view the figure of a man standing about six feet high, and of a broad and powerful build, attired in a hunting-shirt and leggings of deer-skin, the color of which had once been yellow, but now was stained and discolored to a dirty brown. The shirt and leggings had seen hard service, too, as the many rents and tears, now neatly patched with particolored pieces, proved. The face of the man was a strange one: his nose was large, hooked like an eagle's beak; evidently it had been broken by some heavy blow. His eyes were a dark blue in color—so dark that at first glance they would be called black; his hair was bright red in hue, and was cropped tight to his head. A thin red beard covered the long, pointed chin. High cheek-bones, with the skin drawn tightly over them, and you have the picture of Sol Ginger, the Giant Trapper, generally called by the whites "Old Sol," and by the red-skins "Longlegs"—the man who had trapped over every inch of ground from the Snake river on the South to the Red river of the North; the man, too, who feared to shed human blood—who would rather go ten miles out of his way than slay a red-skin brave, but who was known throughout the mountain region as the best shot, the roughest rider, and the keenest woodman that ever trapped a beaver or put a ball through a mountain elk at a hundred paces.

"Drunk ag'in, by hooky!" cried the trapper, as his eyes fell upon the face of the redoubtable Mudhole, who stood blinking like an owl, in a vain attempt to appear sober.

"Mudhole big chief! No like rum heap!" stammered the savage, in defense.

"You lie, you drunken cuss you!" exclaimed the trapper. "Rum! it's mother's milk to you, you long-legged son of a pine tree! Do you s'pose I'm goin' to tote round any sich whisky-tub as you air, dod rot you?" cried the trapper, indignantly.

The Indian hung his head sheepishly at this torrent of words.

"White chief want see Old Sol," said Mudhole, endeavoring to turn the trapper's attention from himself to the strangers.

"Old Sol!" cried the trapper, in a rage. "Who in thunder air you callin' Old Sol, you p'ison son of a skunk you? My name's Solomon Ginger, Esq., dod rot you?"

"Longlegs big chief! Heap fight!" said the

savage, thinking by the compliment to appease the angry trapper.

"You mud-colored heathen, your own legs air a heap sight longer nor mine. You'll scuse me, gentlemen, but this 'ere Indian's enough to rile the stomach of a dead b'ar. He's the most ornery cuss you ever heerd tell on. In two minutes arter he strikes a settlement he's as drunk as an eel in a pot," said the trapper, turning to the two strangers; "but, walk in, strangers. Ef you want to see Sol, the Trapper, I s'pect I'm the man, as the lawyers say, to the best of my knowledge and belief."

"If you are Sol, the Trapper, you are the very man we want to see," said Wright.

"Wal, come into my ranch, strangers, an' you, you durned, copper-colored, no-souled critter you, ef I ketch you hangin' up by the nose round any rum-shop, you an' I'll cry quits. Jes' you bear that in mind."

"Mudhole big chief. Fight rum—enemy!" said the drunken savage.

"Jes' so; though an Injun, you foller the Scriptures, don't ye? 'Love yer enemies,' you mutton-headed son of a rattlesnake?"

And with this parting salutation hurled at the offending chief, the trapper led the way into his shanty. Wright and Courtney followed; the Indian stretched himself out before the door, despite the hot beams of the sun pouring down upon him.

The interior of the trapper's abode was as plain as the outside. The furniture consisted of a little pine table, a common rocking-chair, and half a dozen boxes of various sizes, that served as tables and closets, and held the simple cooking-utensils of the hunter. In one corner stood a Henry repeating rifle, splendidly ornamented with silver on the stock; in another, one of the old-fashioned rifles, with a barrel of prodigious length, and carrying a ball of a hundred to the pound. Suspended from a nail by a cord was a buck-horn handle hunting-knife, long, broad, heavy and sharp—no child's plaything for holiday use, but the forest weapon, keen and true. Hanging to nails on the walls in various places, were the traps of Old Sol, the tools of his trade, the deadly agents that had taken the life of many a beaver and muskrat by the side of the swift-flowing rivers of the great North-west.

"Sit down, strangers," said the trapper, after they had entered the shanty. "I hain't got much furniture, 'cos you see my home is the wilderness. I rough it thar, an' in course I rough it hyer too."

Wright and Courtney sat down upon the boxes.

"Wal, what is it? S'pose I'm open fur a trade," said Sol.

"I wish to make an excursion into the Blackfoot country. In fact, go up the valley of the Flathead river, and I wish a guide. Will you accept the position?" asked Wright.

"What on airth do you want up thar?" asked Sol, in amazement.

"That's my secret," replied Wright, with a smile. "Will you go with me?"

"Wal, I don't know. How many be thar in your party?" asked the trapper.

"Two only; my friend here and myself."

"And you want to go into the Blackfoot country?"

"Yes."

"But, creation! it's almost certain death. Don't you know, stranger, that the Blackfeet are deadly enemies to the whites?" asked the Giant trapper.

"Yes, I know that; but still, I wish to go right into the heart of the Blackfoot country. Nay, more, I shall probably have to penetrate secretly into their villages."

"I think I git your idee: you want a guide that kin carry you through the country without havin' to fight the Injuns every step."

"That's my idea exactly. I have been told that you know the country well, and are a prudent, careful man—one not inclined to run heedlessly into danger. Understand me, I wish to avoid encountering the savages if possible. My errand must be successful through cunning, not through force."

"You ain't arter a gold mine, air you?" asked the hunter suddenly.

"No," answered Wright.

"Cos, if you were, I wouldn't stir a dod-rotted step. Thar's gold 'nough now in the world, 'nough to make half the people that gits it imps of Satan."

"Be assured it is not gold but something else I seek."

"Jes' so; some friend of yours has been captivated by the Blackfeet, an' you want to find out whether they are dead or alive."

Wright started; the shrewd trapper had half guessed his secret.

"Yes; you have guessed the truth. Will you go as guide?"

"Sartin," replied the trapper, quickly. "Guess I won't hold back when a feller-critter's in danger. When I do, you kin jist take the hide right off me, an' tan it for moccasins."

"What will the service be worth?" asked Wright.

"I'll tell you better when we git back; but mind, now, we ain't to do any fighting ef we kin help it. You see, it goes ag'in my grain to shed blood, human blood, whether it's red or white."

"We are not eager to run into danger," replied Wright; "but, would it not be as well to take another mountain man with us? My friend and I know very little of woodcraft."

"Sartin, an' I've got jist the man."

"You have?"

"Fact, by hooky!" cried the trapper. "That drunken Injun, Mudhole, fetched you up hyer, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"He's the very identical critter that we want to go along with us."

"What, that drunken brute?" cried Courtney.

"Jes' so; but he don't get drunk arter he leaves the settlements. He's the best guide that ever follered a trail. Nary foot of sile 'tween hyer an' the Lake of the Woods that he don't know jist as well in the darkness as in the light. He's been a partner of mine now, nigh onto three years. I picked him up hyer in Fort Benton, 'bout three years ago. He'd come to town, got drunk, an' been beat almost to death by some of the river-men. I took him home hyer; cured him, an' he's follered me like a dog ever since. Ef I could only keep him away from the cussed whisky, I wouldn't ask for a better critter; but when the durned rum gets into him, he ain't worth shucks."

"But away from the settlements, you say, he is perfectly trustworthy," said Wright.

"Jes' so; ef he ain't, kick me to death with cringles. He's jist old chain-lightnin' in the Injun country. When shall we start on our expedition?"

"As soon as possible," replied Wright.

"Wal, I ain't got nothing to hinder me, so we'll take the trail to-morrow morning 'bout four. Any 'ticular part of the Blackfoot country you want to go to?"

"Yes; to the village of the White Wolf."

"Jes' so! I know the critter. He's one of the top dogs among the Blackfeet. Nigh onto five hundred warriors in his village. He's a deadly enemy of the whites. About ten years ago he jist worried the settlements along the border hyer like Old Scratch. Lordy! I remember the time he come down on Elk City—it were only a leetle ranch then—like a thousand of brick. It were the toughest old fight you ever did see."

"He's the chief whose village I seek," said Wright.

"Wal, I'll put you through thar, or my name ain't Solomon. But now, strangers, you want to fix your traps, for it tain't a picnic we're goin' onto. Got any boss?"

Wright replied in the negative.

"Wal, I know a couple of ponies you kin buy, heap cheap, as my drunken Injun Mudhole would say."

"Mudhole!" said Courtney. "That's a strange name for a chief."

"Jes' so! Some of the river-men named him, 'cos he was always drunk, an' ginerally lay around loose in the mud."

"What tribe does he belong to?" asked Wright.

"Stranger, you've got me; I don't know. He thinks a heap of me, and I think would fight to the death for me every time; but he won't tell the name of his tribe. I had an idee that he were a Blackfoot, but one day down in the village he got into a fight with some Injuns of the Blackfoot tribe, an' nigh killed one of 'em afore they pulled him off, an' of course he wouldn't do that ef he were a Blackfoot, 'cos of course dog won't eat dog."

"That's very true," said Wright.

"In course; it's human natur," sagely replied the trapper. "But, to come back to our mutton, you want, besides the hosses, a couple of good revolvers, a rifle, a repeating one ef you kin git it, 'cos if you're close pressed, them things tell."

"My friend has a Colt's repeating rifle, and I a Henry," said Wright.

"Them will do bully! Thar's a Henry over thar," and the trapper pointed to the corner where the rifle stood.

"It's a beautiful weapon," said Courtney, picking it up and looking at it.

"Jes' so! It's a present from old Col. Buckner. He were cut off from his command by the Blackfoot Injuns in the Flathead valley, when he were on a scouting expedition. I were up thar trapping beaver, an' happened to run across him. Things were rough, I tell you; the red devils were round as thick as 'skeeters in a swamp. I thought our top-knots were gone two or three times; but, Lordy! we managed to slip right through 'em slick as a whistle! The old colonel were tickled to death. He said he thought he should never see the white settlements ag'in, an' he gin me that Henry as a sort of remembrance like. I didn't think much of it at first, with all the gingerbread work onto it; but when I come to try it, an' found out how many shots a minute I could fire with it, an' that it would carry further than my old rifle thar, I kinder concluded it wasn't a bad friend to have in the wilderness."

"I should say not," said Wright; "but, suppose we go and look after those ponies you spoke of. The sooner we set out the better."

"Jes' so! You're right thar," said the trapper, emphatically. "We'll jist go arter the beasts, git our traps together—an' we want to travel light, gentlemen—an' at four in the morning we'll be among the missin'."

The trapper rose from his seat, conducted his guests out of doors, fastened the door carefully behind him, for, as he explained:

"Henry rifles air scarce up hyer, an' some no-souled critter might captivate mine ef I left the shanty open."

The Indian, Mudhole, whom we left asleep before the door, had disappeared.

"The durned red cuss has gone arter rum ag'in. He's a pesky cuss, he is, arter fire-water. We'll find him down in the village, hanging round some of the rum-shops," said the Giant Trapper, leading the way to the village. Wright and Courtney followed him.

A few minutes' walk brought the trio to a shanty occupied as a general store, and where a small assortment of almost every thing was kept. Entering the store, Sol inquired for the proprietor, who soon made his appearance—a large, full-bearded fellow. From the trader Wright and Courtney purchased two hardy ponies.

"Sheet-iron, gents?" as the trader remarked, referring to the horses.

The money was paid over and the trade completed.

"Send the animiles up to my ranch, an' have 'em tied outside," said Sol.

"Better not," said the trader.

"Why not?" asked the Giant Trapper.

"Don't think it's safe," replied the trader.

"Thar's a heap of Injuns in town, an' the two-legged brutes will be putty apt to steal any thing in the way of hoss-flesh that they kin lay their red paws on."

"What tribe?" asked Sol.

"I don't know—an ugly set of devils. Guess thur Blackfoot."

"That ain't likely," replied Sol; "they don't often come in hyer."

"Maybe not, said the trader; "but, I advise you not to leave your hosses around loose."

"Nuff sed," replied the trapper, laconically; "a wink's as good as a nod to a blind hoss. We'll call fur the hosses as we come back." Then he led the way to the street again. In the street he turned to his companions.

"Let's go an' take a look at these 'ere Injuns. Ef they air Blackfoot—which I doubt—we may get some information from 'em in regard to the village of the White Wolf. You see, these Injuns shift their villages about, jist as the game is plenty or scarce."

So, down the street went the three. When they arrived opposite to where the steamer lay—the one that had brought Wright and Courtney—they noticed a little knot of people gathered in front of one of the trading-stores.

"The Injuns air in thar, I'll bet," said Sol. "They've probably brought in some peltries, an' they're tradin' 'em off."

"Suppose we go in and see," suggested Wright.

"Jes' so! but don't let on that you want to find out anything about them (of they be Blackfoot) or 'bout their country, 'cos ef you do, they lie! all git out. Jist you let me talk to 'em; I'll find out jist what we want to know, without any red cuss smelling out our trail."

"We will leave the whole matter in your hands," replied Courtney.

"Jes' so, an' ef I don't succeed, jes' you wallop me to death with a beaver-tail."

So, pushing his way through the throng of

idlers, the Giant trapper, followed by the two adventurers, entered the store.

CHAPTER III.

ONE AGAINST SIX.

INSIDE the little store stood three Indians—as usual wrapped up tightly in their blankets. Before them lay a small pack of peltries, for which they wished a supply of powder and lead. Two of the Indians were men, the third was a woman, and, as is usual with the squaws when visiting the settlements, she had her blanket drawn tightly over her head, almost concealing her face from view; yet, from the glimpse that could be caught of it through the opening of the blanket, one would have pronounced the squaw to be both young and handsome.

As Sol and the two adventurers entered the store, the Indians and the trader were engaged in a brisk discussion as to the value of the furs—the trader not being willing to give the price demanded for them by the Indians.

Courtney's eyes were instantly attracted by the young squaw; and with a natural curiosity, he drew near to her, anxious to get a better view of her features. She, perceiving the movement, and guessing the object, drew the blanket still closer, so that only her coal-black eyes, brilliant as stars, could be seen.

At the entrance of the Giant Trapper and his companions, the Indians bent a piercing glance upon them, and the elder chief—a huge brave, and very dark in color—said a few words in the Indian tongue to the younger chief. The words evidently had some reference to the trapper, as the young chief looked at him from head to foot. For a moment, then, both the Indians turned their attention to the furs again.

"How air you, Martin?" said Sol, nodding to the trader.

"Sol, you're the very man I want to see!" cried the trader, who answered to the name of Martin. "Give us your judgment hyer. What's these peltries worth?"

Sol drew near and examined the skins carefully. As he did so, he gave vent to a low whistle of astonishment. The Indians noticed the whistle, and exchanged glances of alarm. The elder looked toward the door, as if seeking an avenue of escape.

"Well, Sol," said the trader, "what are they worth?"

"Wal, I don't exactly know; that depends, in course, on the state of the market," said the trapper, slowly, and then he turned his eyes upon the Indians. "Whar did you trap these hyer, eh?"

"Big river," said the elder chief, extending his hand in the direction of the north fork of the Missouri.

"Oh!" said the trapper, and there was an expression of doubt in his tone. "Is the chief a Blackfoot?" he asked.

"No," replied the Indian; "Crow!"

"That's a lie," said the trapper to himself; then he continued his questions:

"Does my brother know a Crow chief named White Wolf?" and the trapper bent his keen eyes full upon the face of the Indian as he spoke. In spite of the almost impenetrable mask of stolidity that the savage wore upon his features, a slight expression of astonishment, not unmingled with alarm, appeared upon his face at the question.

"White Wolf," the Indian said, slowly. "No Crow chief named White Wolf."

"It is so, by gravy!" suddenly cried the trapper, in great astonishment, whether real or affected we leave the reader to guess. "I mean a Blackfoot chief. His village is up on the Flathead river, near the Great Cañon. I swow! I wonder how I came to forget it, 'cos I were a-trappin' up thar last spring, an' I lost a pack of skins jist about the size and heft of this hyer, in a real curious manner. In course of you air a Crow you don't know nothin' 'bout it at all!" and the trapper looked at the Indians in a comical way, a broad grin upon his features, and yet, to a close observer, there was anything but a pleased look in his eyes.

"Thunder!" cried the trader; "you don't mean to say that they went for you, Sol?"

"You can take the hide right off my back ef they didn't," said Sol, with a grin. "An' ef I hadn't the longest pair o' legs that were ever on mortal man, my top-knot would be hangin' in White Wolf's wigwam this 'ere very minute."

"You don't say so?" cried the trader, in amazement.

"Sartin sure! I run a foot-race with 'em from the Great Cañon down to Dead Man's Creek, an' I only come out a neck ahead"—the same good-humored grin upon the trapper's face.

"Sun go soon," said the elder Indian, who evidently felt ill at ease. "If white chief want skins, Injun take what white man say—so much," and the chief held up his fingers to denote the amount.

"A trade's a trade," said the trader. "I reckon I won't back out of my word. Hyer's your powder and lead, chief," and the trader produced the articles.

"Good!" said the Indian, eagerly securing the articles about his person. "Injun get more skins; come see white brother ag'in."

"You won't git any more skins the way you got those, without hev'in' a fight fur 'em, red-skin," said the Giant Trapper.

All looked at him in amazement.

"What the deuce do you mean, Sol?" asked the trader, in astonishment.

"Only a joke, that's all," said the trapper, quietly. "The chief understands, don't you, eh?"

But if the Indian understood, he didn't wait to say so.

"How?" said the chief, as a parting salutation, as he passed through the door, followed by the other brave and the squaw.

"See you ag'in, Martin," said Sol, following the Indians, and signing to Wright and Courtney to follow him.

"All right; drop in," said the trader, as they passed through the door.

Once in the street, Sol looked around for the Indians. His quick eye soon discovered them some little distance down the street, going toward the outskirts of the town, and hurrying along as if fearful of pursuit.

"You cussed red niggers, you! I'd like to know what you air arter," said Sol, throwing a glance of hatred toward the red-skins.

"Do you know them?" asked Wright.

"Wal, I kin make a shrewd guess 'bout 'em. You saw that air pack of peltries that they traded in the store?"

"Yes."

"I trapped every durned one on 'em."

"You did?" said Wright, in astonishment.

"Ef it 'tain't so, take me by the back of the neck and shake me right out of my meggassins," cried the trapper.

"But, if they are your skins, how came the Indians by them?" asked Courtney.

"Why, I were a-trappin' up in the Blackfoot country, an' the red devils went fur me fur all I were worth jist then. They got my skins, but I went over the airth so thurderin' fast, I didn't have time to stop an' leave 'em a lock of my hair," said the trapper, with a grin.

"But these fellows are Crows," added Wright.

"Crows! wah!" cried the trapper, in a tone of contempt. "So am I a Crow! Thar ain't no Crow 'bout them! Thar Blackfoot from ha'r to heel."

"Blackfoot!" cried both the adventurers in astonishment.

"Jes' so. Ef they ain't, jes' shave my head an' swallow me hull," said the trapper, making this singular proposal with a grin. It is perhaps needless to remark that neither of his companions accepted it.

"But if they are Blackfoot Indians, what are they doing here, and why should they deny their tribe?" asked Wright.

"Why," cried the trapper in astonishment, "didn't I find the red devils with my peltries in their fore-paws—the very blessed skins that I trapped this 'ere spring on the Flathead river, near the Great Cañon, and that these red snakes run me away from, durn their d-d-d-rotted copper-colored skins? I knowed every peltry; nary one thar but's got my mark onto it, an' of course they air goin' to git out of the scrape ef they kin; but they ain't a-goin' to say right out that they air Blackfoot; right afore me."

"But why didn't you claim the skins?" asked Courtney.

"Wal, I don't like to have any trouble ef I kin help it. Then it would be takin' an unfair advantage right here onto my own dunghill, to pick up a fight with 'em. The scrape were commenced in their country, an' I'd jist as lief work it out in the same region," said the trapper, with that inherent love of fairness which is so prevalent among the mountain men. "They got the best of me last spring; now I'll git the best of them this summer; an' ef I don't steal the best hoss they've got in White Wolf's village in trade fur my skins, then my name ain't Sol Ginger, and I don't know what a beaver-skin is!"

Just at this moment, the tall Indian who had carried on the conversation in the trading-store, turned round and beheld the trapper and his companions looking after them.

"Ugh! Longlegs is watching us," he cried, in the Blackfoot language, addressing his companion.

"The white dog knows us!" returned the other.

"Yes, perhaps; if he follows us he will discover our party, and defeat our plans to surprise the whites."

"Let us go back and stay in the town till night; then we can steal away without notice," said the smaller of the two.

"The Red Hand speaks with a straight tongue; it is good. The chiefs of the Blackfeet will wait for their chief till the ground is dark," replied the elder chief, "White Bird," he continued, addressing the squaw, "keep your blanket about your face; let not the white chiefs see the face of the Flower of the Blackfeet."

So, with slow steps, the Indians bent their way again to the village.

"They are returning," cried Courtney.

"Jes' so!" said Sol. "I'll keep my eyes peeled, you bet; but, we want some crackers and fixings for our journey; we'll see these critters ag'in afore we reach the Great Cañon on the Flathead, or I'm a sucker."

So the trio moved off toward the trading-store again. Courtney, however, had determined to see the face of the squaw if possible. The glimpse he had caught of her bright, shy black eyes had thrilled him to the soul. Youth is impulsive. Already he was half in love with the young squaw, whose eyes alone he had seen, but who was—he was convinced—both young and beautiful. So, when his companions entered the store, he remained outside and kept his eyes upon the Indians.

The two braves and the squaw came slowly along, as if unconscious that their movements were watched, but they knew it full well, for the keen eyes of the elder chief had detected the form of the young man standing in the doorway, and his glances toward them. The Indians went down the street till they came to where a little clump of trees cast a shadow upon the ground. In the shade of these trees they sat down, apparently unconscious of all that was going on around them.

"I'd give a few dollars to see that girl's face and have a few words with her, Indian though she is," said Courtney to himself, as he looked long and wistfully at the coarse red blanket that concealed the form and face of the Indian girl.

Courtney's attention was diverted from the Blackfeet by a drunken yell coming from one of the numerous drinking shops up the street, by the river-bank. The first yell was followed by a second, and then half a dozen fellows, evidently flushed with liquor, came from one of the saloons and reeled down the street toward the Indians. There were six or seven in the party—rough customers they were, too; river-men, gamblers, and one or two mountain men.

"I hope the drunken brutes won't trouble the girl," said Courtney to himself, as he beheld the crowd advancing; but, as he expected, the moment one of the drunken fellows beheld the group under the trees, he called the attention of his companions to the Indians.

"Here's some cussed red-skins, an' a squaw too!" shouted the foremost one of the gang, heading directly for the trees. Courtney, too, advanced toward the group. He loosened his revolver in its sheath, determined to use it on the drunken gang, if necessary.

"Say, old gal!" shouted the leader of the rough fellows, as he got near the Indians, "take your kiver off and let us see your pretty red face, can't you?"

All of the Indians rose to their feet; the hands of the chiefs sought the handles of their knives beneath their blankets; a fight was at hand.

(Reader, this is the way one-half of our Indian wars begin. The Indian comes into our frontier settlements, peacefully and well-behaved; he is abused and outraged by some drunken ruffians, and, in return, he carries fire and steel along the whole line of the border.)

"Tear the blanket off, Dick, if she won't show her face," shouted another of the gang.

"I will, you bet!" replied the ringleader of the party, who had been addressed as Dick; and he advanced with outstretched hand toward the Indian girl; but, with a motion quick as thought, the elder Indian stepped before the squaw with a long, glittering knife in his hand. The rough bully recoiled before the determined aspect of the red chief.

"White man drink heap fire-water. Go home; no touch Indian!" said the chief, in a deep tone.

At this unexpected check to their amusement,

the rage of the crowd knew no bounds. Knives and pistols were instantly drawn, and flourished furiously by the rough fellows.

"Cut his heart out, Dick!" "Shoot the blasted Injuns!" "Kill 'em!" were the cries that came from the crowd as they brandished their weapons. With a large portion of the frontier settlers, the Indian is regarded as an object to be put out of the way as soon as possible. But, as the hostile, drunken crowd swayed toward the red-skins, Courtney, with revolver in hand, cocked and leveled at them, stepped to the side of the Indians, and again checked the advance.

"What the blazes do you want?" growled the bully, Dick, anxiously seeking to get outside of the line of the six-shooter, yet not wishing absolutely to retreat.

"Allow me to ask you the same question: 'what the blazes do you want?'" replied Courtney, with a calm, quiet voice, carefully turning the revolver in the direction of the rough left nearest to him by Dick's retreat. That worthy no sooner had perceived the muzzle of the revolver turned in his direction, and taken a single glance into the shining tube, than he instantly executed a retrograde movement, which brought him up in a safe position in the rear of all the rest of the party.

"We want to cut the heart out of this cursed Injun!" howled the fellow left nearest to Courtney by the retreat of Dick and the second rough.

"Oh, you do, do you?" asked Courtney, in a pleasant, quiet way, leveling the revolver full at his head.

"Yes, we—" and here the speaker caught sight of the six-shooter, capped and leveled full at his head. This sight caused him to pause in his speech; a glance around at his comrades disclosed the astounding fact that they were gradually retreating beyond the range of the weapon, and that he was left confronting the deadly tubes alone. No man rushes heedlessly upon death, unless he is a madman; so, after another glance at his companions, the last ruffian commenced backing toward them.

"I'll see you ag'in!" muttered the rough, retreating a little faster.

"All right; come and see me often," responded Courtney, bending down his head a little to one side, as if drawing a "bead" on the retreating man, who, perceiving the movement, incontinently turned his back, and his retreat quickened into a run, until he had joined his companions. The drunken fellows shook their fists fiercely for a minute or so at Courtney, and then plunged into the saloon from whence they came.

Thus one cool, determined man, aided by a six-shooter, put to flight half a dozen fellows, several of whom were armed fully as well as himself.

Courtney turned to the Indians.

"White chief heap brave! heart big! Injun think much, speak little. When time comes, Injun pay white chief, perhaps; no tell now," said the tall chief, bending a keen glance upon the young man.

"My red brother is welcome," said Courtney, speaking in the Indian fashion.

"Young chief go with Longlegs, eh?" questioned the savage.

Courtney wondered at the question, but he answered it.

"Yes; Sol, the big trapper, you mean?"

"Ugh! Longlegs big chief! No fight much; run heap! Injun no catch Longlegs; he scalp beaver, heap."

It was very evident to Courtney that the chief was well acquainted with the trapper.

"Ugh! Crow!" said the young chief, pointing down the street to an Indian riding along on a pony. Both the chiefs turned their backs upon Courtney and the squaw to gaze at the strange Indian. Courtney cared little for the Crow brave, and eagerly embraced the opportunity to steal a glance at the Indian girl. She perceived the motion, and, with a quick glance toward the chiefs to note if they were watching, unfolded the blanket and disclosed to the admiring eyes of Courtney the prettiest face he thought he had ever looked upon! The features of the Indian girl were regular, and really very beautiful. A long, straight nose, eyes of lustrous black, of liquid fire and of melting tenderness; full, pouting lips, red as the carnation flower, sweet in their dewy fullness; a little chin, exquisitely formed, and a throat perfect as sculptor ever carved from silent marble. The clear skin, too, through which the rosy blood was blushing, was of a brunette tinge, not the red hue of the Indian, but as if the torrid summer sun had kissed the dainty cheek with a lover's passionate kiss.

For a moment Courtney gazed upon the beautiful girl before him, and then, as if fearful of being surprised by the chiefs, she again drew the blanket over her face, and Courtney descended from heaven to earth.

The chiefs having watched the Crow dismount, and enter one of the trading-stores, turned again to the young man.

"When do my brothers go to their wigwams?" asked Courtney.

"When the coyote howls and the spirit lights come," replied the chief, pointing to the sky. By the "spirit lights," Courtney guessed that the Indian meant the stars.

"Will not my brother come to my wigwam and eat?"

"Injun not hungry; bumby come, perhaps," replied the chief, seating himself upon the ground. The squaw and the young Indian followed his example.

Seeing that there was but little chance of again beholding the girl's face, Courtney slowly walked toward the trading-store.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE NIGHT.

As the young adventurer walked slowly along, his thoughts were of this beautiful young savage, the strange-hued daughter of the red-skins, whose cheek was nearly as white as his own.

"Shall I ever see her again?" cried the young man to himself. Some instinct within his breast assured him that he would.

"By Jove!" he cried, to use our frontier expression, "she's taken me for all that I'm worth."

At the trading-store Courtney found Old Sol and Wright. The trapper had completed his purchases, and the trio turned their steps toward his shanty.

"That air Injun business gits me," said Sol, with a wise shake of the head.

"Then you think that they had some other object in coming than to exchange their skins for powder and lead?" asked Wright.

"Wal, yes, I do think so; it 'tain't often that the Blackfeet trouble us much in hyer. Praps the red skunks want to see ef thar were any train a-goin' to start across the mountains, an' ef thar were a chance for plunder."

"But they have a squaw with them," said Courtney.

"Yes, that shows that they ain't on the war-path. I kinder guess the'r on a sort of smelling-out expedition, jist to see what they can dis-kiver."

By this time the three had reached the trapper's shanty, and the shades of night were beginning to gather over the prairie.

"See here," said Sol, suddenly, as they entered the shanty, "I ain't hearn your names yit, an' as we're goin' to be chums for a few weeks, it don't sound right fur to be callin' you misters."

"My name is Roderick Wright," said the elder, "and this gentleman's name is Harry Courtney."

"Jes' so!" replied Sol. "My handle in course you know; Solomon Ginger, called fur short Old Sol, an' by the red heathens Longlegs, 'cos I kin outrun any two-legged critter that ever sot foot on the top of the airth in this 'ere region."

"Not a bad gift for a man like you," remarked Wright.

"Not much, you bet!" replied the trapper; "but now, gents, hyer's some blankets, an' hyer's the good old solid airth, an' as we've got to make tracks at daybreak, we mought as well take a cat-nap as not. I'll jist go down an' bring up the hosses, an' hitch 'em with my two beasts outside in the little corral at the back of the shanty. They'll be safe thar from either Injun or white."

The trapper departed after the horses, and Wright and Courtney seated themselves upon the boxes to await his return.

In a short time the Giant Trapper returned, with the two horses they had purchased at the trading-store. These he put in the little yard attached to the back of the shanty, where two more ponies were already tethered—one a little mud-colored animal, of the kind commonly called "claybank." This the trapper pointed to with pride, as being the "cutest, smartest little animal that ever walked over the top of the airth." The other was a rough, shaggy beast, that looked as if he were thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"That's Mudhole's animile," said Sol. "He's a regular Indian hoss, out an' out, an' I b'lieve he likes a red-skin a durned sight better nor I does a white; but as fur that air leetle cuss of

mine," pointing as he spoke, with pride, to the mud-colored pony, "she can smell an Injun a mile, an' hates 'em like old Satan. He's nearly kicked Mudhole's head off three or four times; he's p'ison on Injuns."

"A useful brute," said Wright.

"That's so; kin travel his sixty miles a day, day in an' day out, gits fat on a chaw tobacco, an' kin sleep on the top of a rail fence;" and a broad grin spread over the trapper's face as he descanted on the good qualities of the mud-colored beast.

"I suppose we had better take our rifles and little traps from the boat to-night," said Wright.

"Sartin; they ain't apt to be stirrin' in the mornin', an' we'll take wing mighty airly."

"Come, then, Courtney," said Wright. "We'll be back in a few minutes."

"Jes' so. I'll have some fodder ready fur yer. I've got the nicest buffalo-tongue hyer that ever a hungry man put his teeth into. Then, after foddering up, we'll take a shake-down till mornin'."

Wright and Courtney left the shanty and walked down the street to the boat. It had now grown quite dark, and as there was no moon, our friends could scarcely see ten paces before them.

They reached the steamer, however without accident; there they got their rifles and a few other "small traps," as the clerk of the steamer denominated them, and proceeded to return to the trapper's shanty.

They had nearly gained half the distance, when three dark forms brushed by them in the gloom. The darkness was so great that the figures could not be easily recognized, yet Courtney felt sure that it was the two Indian braves and the young Indian girl who had just passed him. A wild wish sprang up in his breast to once again see the Indian girl—if possible to speak to her; and he determined to gratify that wish. He did not, for a moment, consider that possibly the girl knew nothing of the English tongue, and as he knew not a single word of any of the Indian languages, conversation might therefore be impossible. Love is blind, however. Courtney had but one wish, one thought, to see the fair face of the savage maiden—if possible, to touch her hand, to tell her that she was loved, to ask love in return!

So, on arriving at the trapper's shanty, Courtney placed his "plunder" inside, said quietly that he would return in a moment, and then retraced his steps down the street.

"I may be on a wild-goose chase," he said to himself, as he strolled along in the darkness, his eyes and ears on the watch to detect the three shadowy forms that had passed him but the moment before.

Suddenly a thought occurred to him. Might not the little clump of trees that had shaded the Indians in the day, be the best place to find them in the night? The thought was reasonable; so, toward the trees Courtney slowly bent his steps. In a few minutes he stood beneath the spreading boughs. All was silence; the stillness of the night alone was there.

"Now, then, what is my course of action?" said the young man to himself. "Shall I conceal myself in the bushes, at the foot of these trees, and wait for the coming of the Indians, or shall I give up the chase and return to the trapper's shanty?" A few minutes' thought decided him to adopt the first course of action; so he stretched himself out at full length in the bushes.

Courtney had not been five minutes in the concealment of his ambush, when his quick ear detected the tread of persons approaching. The sound came from the direction of the town.

"The tread is too heavy for my Indian girl," thought he, as the sound came nearer and nearer.

Then, to the eyes of the watching man, two figures loomed up in the gloom of the night. That they were Indians he could plainly see by the blankets wrapped around them.

"These are the two chiefs, but where is my beauty?" questioned the young man, as he peered into the darkness around him, anxious to detect the person of the Indian girl. But, no lithe form, with its light, springing step, rewarded his gaze.

The Indians stopped beneath the trees, and then Courtney saw that he was wrong in his surmise: the two Indians were not the two chiefs who had been with the girl. Here, indeed, was one of them—the elder warrior, who had carried on the conversation, but the shorter one, the younger brave, was not with the old chief. The other Indian now with him, was a warrior fully as tall as the old chief himself.

"The young chief and the girl are then together," said the concealed and anxious young man to himself. "If the old chief is here, the others will come, so I shall see my dark-eyed beauty again, though I may not be able to speak to her. Well, that is better than nothing; it's a poor heart that cannot find consolation, so I'll watch and wait."

The two chiefs commenced speaking. Courtney listened eagerly, but as the chiefs spoke in the Indian language, he had his trouble for his pains. We, however, for the information of our readers, will translate the conversation of the Indians.

"Why does the dog of the white-skins follow the steps of the chief of the Blackfeet?" demanded the old chief.

"The White Wolf speaks with a straight tongue," answered the strange Indian; "the outcast brave is a dog."

The tones of the second Indian's voice sounded strangely familiar to the ear of the watching Courtney, though the meaning of the speech was as Greek to him.

"Where the deuce have I heard that voice?" questioned Courtney, communing with himself and striving through the darkness to distinguish the face of the speaker, but the darkness was too intense. Courtney could only distinguish the outlines of his form.

"Yes, a dog that licks the hand of the whites—the hand of the deadly enemies of his race."

"It is true; the dog is in the dust; why crush him? Let the chief open his ears; he will hear things good for the Blackfeet to know," replied the strange Indian, whose tones sounded so familiar to Courtney's ear.

"Ugh! Can the dog do good to the tribe he has disgraced?" questioned the old chief, in a stern voice.

"The Spotted Elk is dead to the warriors of the Blackfeet; let him rest till the Great Spirit calls him to the happy hunting-grounds," said the strange Indian, in a mournful voice.

"The Spotted Elk was once a great chief of the Blackfoot nation—the great brave of the young warriors; he was the son of the White Wolf. One day he would have been the great chief of the Blackfeet that dwell in the Flathead valley. The Spotted Elk was as brave as the eagle, and as foolish as the owl; he loved the squaw of the Gray Eagle—another's mate. What was the end?" demanded the old chief.

"The Gray Eagle came upon the Singing Bird and the Spotted Elk; he was angry like the great clouds when they look black over the flowers; the Gray Eagle was a great chief, a mighty warrior, strong as the pine-tree, but the Spotted Elk tore his heart out," and the voice of the chief swelled into a tone of triumph as he told of the death of his foe.

"The Spotted Elk speaks truth; the Gray Eagle died by his knife, but the tribe of the Blackfeet killed the Singing Bird—the guilty squaw—and drove the Spotted Elk an outcast from the land of his fathers. For the love of a foolish squaw, the Spotted Elk gave up the chieftainship of the Blackfeet—became a dog in the wigmaws of the pale-faces—rolled in the mud at their feet—drank their fire-water, and became their slave," and the voice of the old chief swelled with indignation as he spoke. The other Indian hung his head, and for a moment made no reply.

The interview was decidedly uninteresting to the listener, Courtney, unable to understand a word of their conversation; he listened with impatience.

"I wish to heaven they'd get out, and that the girl would come!" was his muttered exclamation. Just then a slight noise to the left of him attracted his attention; he listened, and, in a moment, became satisfied that some one else was watching the interview of the two Indians besides himself. For a moment he felt a slight alarm as to his own safety; but, as the other listener, whoever it might be, did not seem inclined to approach, Courtney flattered himself that his presence was unknown. The two Indians again resumed their conversation, he turned his attention to them, thinking that possibly they might say something that he could understand.

"The White Wolf speaks straight; the Spotted Elk is a wanderer, but his heart is Blackfoot. Let the chief open his ears. The White Wolf saw the strange whites with the trapper Longlegs?"

"Yes," answered the old chief.

"The strange chiefs seek the Flathead river, the country of the Blackfeet; they seek something which they will find in the village of the White Wolf. Can the chief guess what they seek?"

"Ugh! the white squaw!" answered the old chief, a heavy frown gathering upon his brows.

"The White Wolf is right; the ears of the Spotted Elk are long; he heard the talk of the white braves; when the sun comes they go."

"Their bones shall whiten in the valley of the Flathead, and the coyote feet upon their hearts!" cried the White Wolf, fiercely.

"Longlegs goes with the white braves."

"He shall die!" exclaimed the old chief.

"No! Longlegs saved the Spotted Elk from the blue-coated whites. If he dies, the Spotted Elk dies too. The White Wolf will spare Longlegs, or the Spotted Elk will tell him not to leave the white wigmaws."

"It is good!" replied the old chief; "Longlegs shall not die; the Spotted Elk shall save him; the others shall die!"

"It is well," laconically replied the Spotted Elk, and then the two chiefs walked on in the darkness, and their figures were soon lost to sight in the gloom of the night.

"Now, I'd like to get out of this," thought Courtney, "but, there's that confounded listener over there. It may be some big Indian who may put a knife into me the moment I show myself. Mighty little information I've got. I wonder where the deuce my Indian beauty is?"

Then, a noise from the direction of the concealed person, that was yet to be proved friend or foe, attracted his attention. He turned his eyes toward the spot; a dark figure rose from the ground and advanced directly to the hiding-place of Courtney. Through the gloom he could distinguish that it was an Indian; on came the figure steadily toward him.

"I've got to fight for it!" said the young man, between his teeth. He sprang to his feet, drawing his revolver as he did so, and leveling it full at the breast of the advancing stranger, who, however, did not seem to heed the hostile action but still came steadily on.

"Keep off, or I fire!" exclaimed Courtney, as he pressed his revolver almost to the breast of the strange Indian. The blanket dropped from the dark figure, and by the dim light, Courtney could discern that it was the Indian girl who stood before him. A cry of delight escaped his lips at the welcome sight.

"White chief will not shoot Indian girl!" said the maiden, in good, plain English, with only a slight Indian accent.

"Shoot you!" cried Courtney, pushing his revolver back to its place. "I would rather shoot myself!"

"Is white chief glad to see Indian girl?" questioned the maid.

"Glad! To be sure I am!" he cried. "That was my object in lying concealed beneath these trees, to see you."

"You like me?" the girl asked, looking into Courtney's face with her bright, beautiful eyes, now full and lustrous as rippling waves.

"Like!" cried Courtney, impetuously; "I more than like; I love you!" and, with a quick movement he drew the unresisting girl to his breast. A moment he held her there—a moment he heard the beating of her heart against his own, and then his lips met hers in one long, lingering, passionate kiss! The blood danced quickly through his veins; that kiss was the seal of love; henceforth the maid was his forever!

"I love you!" said the girl, softly, looking with her full, lustrous eyes into her lover's face.

"And you will leave your tribe and go with me?" questioned Courtney.

"Yes," and the girl, looking quickly around, peering through the gloom, as if fearful of being surprised, asked: "You go with the trapper Longlegs into the Blackfoot country?"

"Yes," answered Courtney, in astonishment; "how did you know that?"

"You understand the Blackfoot language?" asked the girl.

"No."

"Then you could not understand what the chiefs said."

"No."

"Ah!" and the girl for a moment was silent; then she again continued: "You seek something in the Blackfoot country?"

"Yes," said Courtney, wondering where the girl could have procured her knowledge. "I seek a treasure worth fifty thousand dollars, so my companion says."

The girl shook her head incredulously.

"I know the treasure you seek; it is a living one, and it will go with you alone. Your companion cannot obtain it though he were backed by all the blue-coated chiefs from the Big river to the great plains."

Courtney looked at the earnest face of the girl in astonishment; he was in a maze; he could make nothing of these strange words.

"I do not understand you," he cried; "explain."

"Some time," said the girl, with a smile. "Good-by, now. You go to the Flathead river; you will be in danger, but I will watch over you, and you shall have the treasure. One word: beware of the Indian, Mudhole! He will betray you to the Blackfeet. Nay, more, he has betrayed you. Good-by!" and the girl folded the blanket around her as if to depart.

"One moment!" cried Courtney, as he pressed a farewell kiss upon her lips. "My name is Harry Courtney; what is yours?"

"White Bird, the Flower of the Blackfeet," murmured the girl, as she glided from his arms and disappeared in the darkness that hung like an inky pall over the earth.

Courtney watched her retreating figure until it was lost to his view, and then, with a heart beating high with joy, he returned to the trapper's shanty and sought his humble couch, a single blanket on the hard earth. But, his dreams that night were pleasant ones, for the dark eyes and red lips of the Blackfoot maid were ever before him.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE HANDS OF THE BLACKFEET.

WHEN the first gray streaks of light appeared in the eastern sky, the Giant Trapper awoke the two adventurers; the trio made a hasty breakfast, and then soon were in the saddle. Hardly had the three mounted, when the Indian, Mudhole, came up, looking as if he had passed the night in some mudhole sleeping off the effects of the potent fire-water.

Mudhole stared at the mounted men; a dim expression of astonishment appeared upon his features.

"Old Sol go—no take Mudhole with him?" questioned the Indian.

"In course not," replied the trapper. "Git your hoss; we're fur the mountains fore the sun'up."

"Mudhole go," responded the savage, as he entered the little corral, and proceeded to saddle his pony, an operation which was extremely simple, said saddle consisting only of a single blanket.

"I knowed he'd come," said the trapper, with a grin. "He's got the cussed whisky out o' him, an' he's a hull team in the wilderness."

By this time the Indian had strapped the blanket on his pony and mounted; then Sol gave the signal, and the party rode off toward the west, taking the trail that led through Cadotte's Pass to the little frontier settlement known as Elk City.

As they rode along, Courtney could not resist taking a searching glance at the redoubtable Mudhole, who rode in the rear, some ten paces behind the rest. The warning of the young Indian girl recurred to the mind of Courtney; her warning was a strange one: "Beware of the Indian, Mudhole; he will betray you to the Blackfeet; nay, more, he has betrayed you."

"What the deuce did she mean?" asked Courtney of himself. "How can he have already betrayed us?—that is the question." But no solution of the mystery presented itself to the young man's mind.

"I'll keep my eyes upon him," he resolved, "and if I see the slightest sign of treachery, I'll blow his brains out as I would a mad dog's."

Carefully did the old trapper lead the march, for, as he explained to Wright and Courtney, they might chance to fall in with a roving band of Crow Indians at any moment, as they were entering the regions inhabited by that warlike tribe.

Thanks to the trapper's precautions, and to the good fortune which kept the Indians from their trail, the little party reached Cadotte's Pass without seeing signs of a hostile savage.

Climbing the rocky passes of the great mountains, our adventurers at length descended on the western side, and turned their course to the north-west, leaving the Elk City trail, and taking a pathway of their own through the rough and timbered defiles.

At the close of a weary day's march, our adventurers halted for rest and supper by the side of a little stream that came tumbling down—the waters pure as crystal—from the overhanging mountains.

"Now, then, we air nigh our journey's end; we foller this leetle brook ten miles or so, and we strike the valley of the Flathead river," said the trapper, as he dismounted and extended his limbs on the grass.

"How far are we, then, from the village of

the White Wolf?" asked Wright, as he followed the trapper's example and reclined at his side.

"Bout ten miles or so—nigh enough to be mighty dangerous of we ain't mighty careful," replied the trapper.

"You think there is danger of the Indians stumbling upon us here?" said Courtney.

"Not much; it's a mighty good time fur our expedition, fur about this time nearly all the young braves air away, down in the plains arter bufflers. It's the hunting season now; but, how on airth air you a-goin' to find out whether this 'ere person you seek is in the village of the White Wolf or not?" asked the trapper, with a doubtful shake of the head.

"That will be a difficulty indeed," said Wright, thoughtfully. "Can you not suggest some plan?"

"In course I kin, but the carryin' of the plans out, thar's whar it gits me," and the old trapper shook his head wisely. "In the first place, plan number one, we mought one on us go onto a smellin' expedition into the village, an' try to diskiver the truth in that air way; but, that air's mighty dangerous, 'cos it would have to be done arter dark, an' ten chances to one we wouldn't l'arn any thing, an' would only have our trouble fur our pains. You see it wouldn't do fur ary one on us to go, fur the durned Indian dogs would smell out that we were white-skins quicker'n a wink; they know a white man as fur as they kin smell him. Why, even one of the Injun ponies will raise old Cain at the sight of a white; the dumb brutes know we ain't friends. So, the only chance would be fur to send Mudhole. In the darkness he might be able to walk right into the village and right out of it, an' the Blackfeet not a bit the wiser."

"That might do," said Wright.

"Yes, it mought; but I've got another plan," said the Giant Trapper; "that is, to captivate one of the Injun squaws an' frighten the truth out of her. The only objection to that air is, that ef we let her go a'gin, she'd have the hull village down 'bout our ears just like stirrin' up a hornet's nest. I guess the best way will be to let Mudhole sneak into the village, arter all."

"Yes, we can give him instructions," said Wright.

"Sartin," replied Sol; "he'll foller 'em. He's just as true as steel; you'll find him squar' every time; ef it tain't so I don't want a cent. But, let's have some supper."

"Supper!" cried Courtney; "that's a good idea; but I wish we had something besides dry beef and corn," which two articles being portable and easily carried, constituted the provisions of our adventurers. During the first of the trip, the rifle of the trapper had produced many a palatable addition to their store, but for the last two days, since entering the rough and timbered defiles that stretched down from the Rocky Mountains to the Flathead river, the trapper had strictly forbidden the use of firearms.

"We air in the enemies' country, an' we mustn't sacrifice our top-knots for the sake of our stomachs," he had quaintly observed.

"Got tired of dried beef an' corn, hey?" asked the trapper.

"Yes," replied Courtney.

"How would you like some baked trout, nice, lively leetle spotted fellers?" asked Sol, with a grin.

"Just you try me with a few," cried Courtney.

"We'll have 'em for our supper to-night," responded the trapper. "This leetle brook is full on 'em. I guess I kin risk a fire—a leetle one, just big enough to cook 'em ef I cover it up well an' keep the smoke under. Here's a line," and he produced a couple from his pocket. "Jist try your luck down the brook, an' ef, in half an hour, we don't have a mess of speckled beauties, just you call me a nigger, that's all."

Courtney took the line and strolled off down the stream. Some hundred yards or so beyond, the brook took a sudden turn, and Courtney, following it, was hidden from the sight of the others. A little way beyond the bend, the brook plunged down over a rocky ledge, forming a charming little cascade. Underneath this cascade was a dark, deep pool, the very haunt the agile brook-trout, the king of the fresh-water fishes, delights in.

Courtney, turning over a decayed stump, procured some little white grubs for bait, and then cast his line into the silent pool. Scarcely had the line touched the surface of the water, ere a fine, large trout made a dash at it, hooked himself, and was soon drawn out on the shelving bank. Courtney knelt to release the hook from the mouth of the fish. As he did so, a slight noise in the bushes near him attracted his atten-

tion. It sounded as if some one, moving cautiously within the thicket, had stepped upon a dry twig, and it had snapped beneath the pressure of the foot. For a moment Courtney listened, his eyes fixed upon the thicket near him. The noise was not repeated, and Courtney, satisfied that it was only some small animal or bird forcing its way through the shrubbery, turned his attention again to the fish. The young man was no woodman; no prairie captain was he; he knew not that, in the wilderness, the woodman looks for a foe in every bush, sees the presence of the red-skinned warrior in the rustling of the leaves, detects the painted foe in the waving of the long grass. The soft wind warns him of danger, the yellow earth beneath his feet tells of the coming fight.

But as we have said, Courtney was no sharp-eyed mountain-man; he knew nothing of the wiles and tricks of the human hyenas who roam the vast expanse of prairie wilderness that, broken by the Rocky Mountains and its ranges, stretches from the Gulf of California to the dense forests of British America.

As Courtney knelt by the side of the fish to extract the hook from his mouth, the dense bushes ten paces back of him were parted noiselessly, and forth into the little glade came a painted savage. Four other Indians followed the first—creeping toward the unconscious white, slowly and noiselessly as the snake gliding toward its prey they came. A moment more and the foremost savage—who was none other than the chief whom we have seen bartering for the skins at Fort Benton—White Wolf, stood within striking distance of Courtney. Slowly the red-skin raised his tomahawk, a moment he held it poised in the air over the head of the unconscious man; then it descended swift as the lightning's flash, and, striking the young adventurer on the head, felled him senseless to the earth.

Courtney fell without even a single cry. Extended upon the earth he fell, stunned, and silent as death; but the young man was not dead. The savage had struck him with the blunt edge of the Indian ax, seeming with the intent to stun, not to kill him.

With a grim smile, the White Wolf looked upon the face of the senseless man.

"The white chief is no fox; he has not the cunning of Longlegs; his scalp would hang in the wigwam of the Blackfoot, but the red-man's heart is big, and he remembers that the pale-face saved the Flower of the Blackfeet from the Big river braves. Young Bear," he said, turning to one of the foremost Indians, "carry the white-skin to the lodges of the Blackfeet; bind him hand and foot with the thongs of deer-skin."

The chief obeyed the words of the White Wolf by casting the senseless form of Courtney upon his shoulder as if it were the body of a child, so powerful was the Indian.

"Longlegs can not be far away. He will not be taken as easy as this young chief, but he shall never return to the Big river; he shall die by the hand of the Blackfoot."

One of the Indians who had noticed the footprints of Courtney, and which way they came, now spoke:

"The white brave came down the stream," pointing to the footprints.

"Wah!" said the White Wolf, with a grunt of satisfaction as he noted the marks. "Young Bear go with the white brave to our wigwams, the rest follow me."

Young Bear, with Courtney upon his shoulder still senseless, stepped off lightly with his load in a north-west direction.

As the reader has doubtless guessed from the words of the White Wolf, the meeting with Courtney was by accident. From the outcast chief, the Spotted Elk, these Blackfeet knew of the expedition of which Longlegs, or, as we better know him, the Giant Trapper, was the guide; but they did not know the exact direction the whites would come in their approach to the Indian village. So, for the three days preceding the one in the evening of which they had captured the helpless Courtney, they had scouted in a circle, some ten to twenty miles from the village, all around it, carefully looking for traces of the white adventurers. Thus had they happened to surprise the young man by the side of the trout-stream.

The Indians had one great advantage of the little party of whites led by the old trapper. Thanks to the Spotted Elk, they knew the object of the whites, while they, the whites, were journeying onward, hoping to surprise the Indian village, and by cunning and stealth steal the treasure which Wright valued at fifty thousand dollars.

"Shall we attack the whites?" asked one of the braves.

"No," answered the White Wolf, "the white chief, Longlegs, is as cunning as the beaver; like the wolf at bay, he fights hard. The Blackfeet would kill the white chief Longlegs, who traps the beaver by the lodges of the red-men; but, if the red-men give the white chief a chance, he will run—and his legs are long like the elk's. If the red braves hem him in he will fight, and his rifle shoots many times at once. Four Blackfeet are not enough to fight Longlegs. The red chiefs will see where the pale-faces have camped; then they will return to the Blackfoot lodges, get more warriors, and burst upon the white-skins like a panther."

The other chiefs gravely nodded assent; they had all witnessed the prowess of the tall hunter, and the quick-repeated shots of his death-dealing rifle, and they had grown to look upon the white trapper as a very dangerous, subtle foe, and one whom force of numbers alone could crush. The reasoning of the White Wolf appeared good to them. Their chief's courage no one of the Blackfoot tribe could gainsay; it had been tried on many a bloody war-path against the whites, proved on many a fierce raid in the Crow country. So, silently, the red chiefs followed the White Wolf, as he advanced cautiously up the stream, following the traces of Courtney's steps.

We will leave the Indians—like so many bloodhounds, following the white man's trail—and return to the Indian who was named the Young Bear, and who bore the form of the senseless Courtney along on his shoulder, as though it were the carcass of a deer.

On through the wilderness with a long, loping stride, went the muscular savage, over hill and dale, through brush and briar; the darkness descended upon the earth, but the savage halted not; onward, straight forward toward the Indian village he went, not turned from his path by rock, brush or streamlet, and some three hours after the time of Courtney's capture, with his helpless burden on his shoulder, still insensible, the Young Bear strode into the Blackfoot village.

The Indian deposited his prisoner on a couch of buffalo-skins in one of the vacant lodges in the center of the village, then he bound the hands and legs of his captive together tightly with stout bonds of deer-skin, and, having thus insured his safety, he left him.

As the Young Bear stepped from the lodge, he was confronted by the figure of the young Indian girl, whom we have seen with the White Wolf in the frontier settlement. She was called by the Indians White Bird, and in their fanciful manner further named the "Flower of the Blackfeet."

The full moon, now shining clear in the sky, threw a flood of pure, soft light down upon the village.

By the rays of the moon the Indian girl perceived a blood-stain upon the hunting-shirt of Young Bear, caused by the blood that had trickled down from the wound in Courtney's head.

"The young chief has been wounded?" the girl asked.

She had rightly guessed that, by this time, the party to which her lover was attached must be near the Indian village, and the blood-stain on the hunting-shirt of the young brave alarmed her. She feared that a meeting already had taken place between the Indians and the whites. That that meeting would be a bloody one she knew too well, for she had overheard the conversation between the White wolf and the Spotted Elk, the outcast Blackfoot brave, in the white settlement. That the purpose of the whites had been betrayed to the Indians, and that the red braves were already on the watch to surprise the long-legged trapper and his companions, she also knew. Little, though, did she think that, even then, her lover was wounded and a prisoner in the hands of his foes. How could she guess that Courtney, the young white chief, the first man who had ever pressed the warm passionate love-kiss upon her red lips, was now bound, hand and foot, with the unyielding withes of deer-skin—that life and death even now contended which should possess him.

"No," responded the chief, proudly. "The blood on the hunting-shirt of the chief is white."

The girl's heart sunk at the words of the Young Bear.

"The young chief has fought with the whites?" she questioned, fearing the worst.

"No; the warriors of the Blackfeet came upon the white brave like the eagle upon his

prey; they struck him as the forked light of the Great Spirit strikes the big tree; he sunk beneath the arm of the Blackfoot, and is now a captive in the red-man's lodge."

"Where?" questioned the girl, eagerly.

"There," replied the warrior, pointing to the wigwam from which he had come, and in which the helpless prisoner was confined. "Would the White Bird look upon the pale chief, let her enter and she shall see the foe of the Blackfeet, crushed beneath the foot of the red-man." Saying which, the warrior stalked off toward his own wigwam.

The Indian girl entered the wigwam that held the white prisoner. All was dark within, yet, despite the gloom, she could distinguish a dark form, extended on the buffalo-skins, and hear the heavy breathing as of one in pain.

With a heart sick with apprehension, the White Bird knelt by the side of the helpless man. She pushed the tangled ringlets of his hair back from his feverish temples; the darkness was so dense she could not see his face, but her heart told her that she knelt by the side of her lover.

A moment she remained by his side, listening to his heavy, painful breathings; then she arose, and with a light step flew to her own wigwam; there she procured a small vessel of water, and with it she returned to the side of the captive. Carefully she bathed his forehead; she loosened the tight bands that bound his wrists; his breathing became easier; he turned restlessly upon his side; his senses were returning.

"Where am I?" he murmured.

His voice told the girl that she held her lover in her arms.

"Harry!" she cried, softly, "dear Harry!"

Courtney knew the voice.

"White Bird?" he exclaimed, as with rapture he pressed her to his heart.

CHAPTER VI.

LONGLEGS SHOWS FIGHT.

HARDLY had the White Wolf and his warriors left the little glade where they had succeeded in capturing Courtney, and their forms were hid by the bushes, as they followed the trail that led up the little stream, when, forth from one of the clumps of trees—the same covert that had hid the savages—stepped the Giant Trapper. He, too, like Courtney, had followed the streamlet down; he, too, had heard the crack of the dried twig that had snapped beneath the foot of one of the Indians; but, unlike Courtney, the sound had excited his suspicions; he had sought the thicket for the cause of the sound, and he had found it in the persons of the Indian braves.

"Wal, we're in fur it now!" cried the trapper, as he stood for a moment thoughtfully in the center of the little glade. "They've captivated the young feller, true as preaching. How on airth did the red devils know that we were in this neighborhood, or did they stumble on us, just by luck?" The trapper pondered on the matter for a few moments. "Not much chance to carry out our ideas now. It'll be all we kin do to look after our top-knots. I don't intend that they shall hang mine up to dry in the smoke of any Injun village, ef I know myself; but, ef we ain't mighty keeful, they'll gobble us in just like a toad eats frogs."

The trapper looked for a moment in the direction that the Indians had taken; not a sound could be heard denoting that there was life within the rocky wilderness.

"To think of the painted serpents comin' right on top on us, in this 'ere way! Why, it riles me right up like a big flood does one of our rivers. I'm gittin' mad! S'pose I should run across one of these heathen devils—wouldn't I be justified in goin' fur him?" and the trapper thought for a moment over the knotty point.

"By Cain!" he cried, slapping his thigh noisefully. "I'll go fur 'em, tooth an' nail! The red heathens have got Courtney; they know we're hyer; we've ever tryin' to make an' nothin' to lose by a fight. I'll give the painted imps a chance to tote another carcass off to their village, but it shall be a red instead of a white man this time, an' thar won't be any doubt as to whether he's dead or alive." And the trapper shut his teeth together with a determination that boded ill to the White Wolf and his band.

"Now, I mustn't run in too close on 'em," muttered Sol, as he followed carefully in the track of the savages, "else they mought lift my ha'r instead of my lifting thar ha'r, which I calculate to do."

On went the old trapper, slowly and noiselessly.

To the looker-on—could there have been one stationed in the sky—the wilderness would have presented a singular sight. First came White Wolf and his three Blackfoot followers, tracking patiently the footsteps of Courtney, expecting each moment to pounce upon the camp of the whites; in their rear came the old trapper, following their trail with all the patience of a sleuth-hound.

The trapper was gaining slowly, but surely, upon the Indians. Once or twice he had caught sight of their dusky forms as they glided from bush to bush, intent on concealing their persons from the expected foe in front, not dreaming of the deadly foe in their rear, who was each moment gaining slowly but certainly upon them.

The shrill cry of a horse broke upon the stillness of the twilight hour. The cry came from the trapper's pony. The sagacious animal had "winded" the approach of the red-men. The old trapper laughed silently to himself at the sound.

"I knew the little beast would smell 'em out soon. Now, Mudhole ought to know what that air means ef he's got the sense of an owl. Ah! the red devils are deliberating, cuss 'em! Thar'll be a dead Injun round hyer in 'bout two minutes."

The trapper drew from his belt the keen-edged hunting-knife; carefully ran his finger over the edge; it was sharp as a razor.

As he had said, the Indians had paused at the shrill cry of the horse, and were clustered together, apparently in council.

Noislessly and with the stealthy caution of the panther stealing upon his prey, knife in hand, the lion-hearted trapper approached his foes, taking advantage of every tree, each piece of rock to shelter him from the gaze of the Indians, should they chance to look behind them.

The warriors were holding a council.

"It was the neigh of a horse," said the White Wolf. "We are then near the camp of the whites."

"Good," answered the warrior who stood next to the White Wolf. "Shall we surprise the white-skins in the night?"

"No," answered the White Wolf, "we are too few. Longlegs and his braves have rifles that fire many times. One of my warriors shall watch the pale-faces; the rest shall return with me to our lodges, and at daybreak, when the light comes, we'll hunt the white warriors to death. Is it good?"

"It is good," replied the chief, who had asked the question—a tall, muscular brave who was known among the Blackfeet as Tall Bull. The other two Indians nodded assent to the words of the chief.

"One will stay and watch the white-skins?" questioned the Tall Bull.

"The chief has spoken," gravely answered the White Wolf.

"The Tall Bull is a great brave of the Blackfeet; he can look a bear to death!" said the chief, proudly; "he will stay and watch the pale-faces till the White Wolf comes back with his braves. Is it good?"

"It is good!" replied the White Wolf; "my brother shall stay. In the night, when the Tall Bull hears the cry of the owl, let him look for the coming of the warriors of the Blackfeet."

Then, swiftly and silently, the White Wolf and the other two Indians retraced their steps, leaving Tall Bull to watch the whites.

The Giant Trapper had perceived the council, and had concealed himself carefully behind a dense clump of bushes; extending himself at full length upon the ground and parting the bushes before him, he could easily watch the Indians.

The White Wolf, followed by the two warriors, came by the hiding-place of the trapper, taking a course, however, that led them wide of his trail, which they would surely have discovered—although it was now getting quite dark, and the discovery might have led to troublesome consequences for the indomitable Sol, as he would have been surrounded by the Indians, front and rear. Now he had but a single foe to deal with—the Blackfoot brave, the Tall Bull, who kept watch between him and the camp of his associates.

"I've got to git past that air feller to git into the camp," said the trapper, musingly; "the Injuns know that we air hyer; they'll probably be down onto us hide an' hair 'fore the mornin'; we've got fur to make a run fur it, an' how on airth air we a-goin' to do it with this critter watching us? That's the question, an' thur ain't any dodgin' it that I kin see." Then the trapper took another look at the Indian before him. In the dim light, Sol could distinguish that the warrior was leaning carelessly against

the trunk of a tree, keeping apparently close watch on the wilderness before him.

"It has got to be did; it's no use talking. Either he or me," said the trapper, rising slowly to his feet and beginning his advance on the unconscious savage before him.

On went the Nemesis, knife in hand, foot by foot approaching the Indian, slowly but surely.

The savage had his eyes carefully fixed upon the open space before him, beyond which, as he guessed, lay the camp of the whites. Little did he dream that danger was nigh, that the white-skinned trapper, the famous Longlegs the beaver-catcher, was on his trail—nay, more, that the keen-edged hunting-knife was even now drawn, ready to be dyed in his heart's blood!

The Blackfoot chief, watching eagerly and intently for signs of the white-skinned in the wilderness before him, was thirsting for the blood of the pale-faces; why not others seek for his blood?

With a snake-like motion, the Giant Trapper had crept over the little space that separated him from the Indian; arriving at length within reach of his prey, he prepared for the final movement. A moment he crouched, like the tiger preparing for his spring; then, like the arrow hurled from the bow, knife in hand, he sprang upon the unsuspecting savage. One deadly stroke, and the keen-edged hunting-knife, driven by the strong arm of the White Avenger, was buried to the hilt in the body of the warrior. A single moan of pain alone escaped the Indian as the keen knife let out his life-blood; a moment the savage tottered, swaying like the pine tree struck by the lightning's blast, and then he fell forward on his face, stone dead. The Tall Bull had given his last war-whoop, had trod his last war-trail; the Black-foot warrior was now but a piece of senseless clay, lying on the earth at the feet of his mortal enemy.

For a moment Sol gazed upon his prostrate foe.

"It seems a pity," he said, quite mournfully, "to kill any of God's critters, but it were either his life or mine, one or the t'other, an' in such a case, better him nor me. He were a long-legged chap too," continued the trapper; looks as of he mought 'a' fought Old Satan."

The Giant Trapper bent over the prostrate warrior and drew the hunting-knife from the body; the blood gushed out afresh. The old trapper, in spite of himself, shuddered at the sight, that, in the dim twilight, looked doubly horrible. He wiped the knife carefully in the earth, by thrusting it in to the hilt and then drawing it forth.

"It seems a pity that we can't live in this world without sheddin' blood, but it can't be did; every critter preys on some other critter weaker than itself," said the trapper to himself, softly; "but thar's no use cryin' over spilt milk. I reckon thar's many a red heathen will feel the p'int of my knife or the bullet of my rifle afore we git out of this. We're in a pesky scrape, an' thar ain't no two ways 'bout it. Sol!" he cried, addressing himself familiarly, "ef you've got any bit of sense, now's the time to show it. I'll leave this feller jist where I struck him; the red devils will be arter us afore we're many hours older. Now fur the camp."

Saying which the trapper proceeded upstream. A few minutes' walk brought him to the glade where he had left Wright, Mudhole and the horses. To the trapper's astonishment he found the little glade empty, except that the horses stood quietly browsing upon the young shrubs where they had been tethered.

"Wa-al!" cried the trapper, in astonishment, "have the red heathens gobbled up Wright and Mudhole, an' without makin' any row 'bout it too? It beats Ned!"

But, as if in answer to the trapper's speech, forth from the little thicket in front of which the horses were tied, came Wright, rifle in hand.

"Is that you, Sol?" asked the adventurer, as he came toward him, hardly able to distinguish him in the dim light.

"Wa-al, I reckon it is," replied the trapper. "What in thunder were you a-doin' in thar?"

"Your horse a few minutes ago seemed alarmed at the approach of something. I remembered what you said in regard to his singular gift for smelling out Indians, and thinking probably that there might be some approaching, I took to cover."

"You were right, by hookey!" cried Sol; "the leetle animile was right every time, you bet!"

"Are there Indians near, then?" eagerly asked Wright.

"Wal, thar were Indians near, an' thar's

a dead buck putty near now," replied the trapper.

"You have had a fight, then?"

"No; it were too one-sided to call it a fight; I stuck the Injun in the back, an' he dropped to one't."

"Only one?"

"Yes; ef thar had bin more, the fight would have been one-sided t'other way."

"Are we in danger now?" asked Wright.

"You kin jist bet we air!" replied the trapper. "The Injun that I killed were left as a sort of scout upon our movements."

"The Indians know of our presence here, then?"

"Wal, they jist do!" cried Sol. "How on airth they diskivered it I don't know, unless they stumbled onto our trail by accident."

"Have you seen Courtney?"

"Poor feller!" replied the trapper; "he's a prisoner in the hands of the cussed red heathens. They hit him a clip side of the head, I s'pose, fur he were stunned an' senseless when I got thar, an' then they toted him off on thar shoulders. I should have piled in an' tried to rescue him, but I didn't know but what thar were a lot of Injuns back in the bush, an' of course it would have been folly to risk my own life without any chance of saving him."

"That's very true; but what is to be done?" asked Wright, with evident anxiety.

"That's what we've got to find out. We're in a tight place, thar ain't any use backin' round the truth. 'Stead of gittin' that air treasure that you're hunting fur among the Blackfeet, we'll be lucky ef they don't git our scalps," said the trapper, quietly and earnestly. "But, what's become of Mudhole?"

"I don't know," answered Wright. "A few minutes after you and Courtney went down the stream, I looked round to speak to him, and found that he was gone. He must have left the glade nearly at the same time as yourself."

"Wal, that air is strange," said the trapper, thoughtfully. "I kinder have an idee that all ain't right 'bout that Injun; he's acted putty queer ever since we started onto this tramp. Jerusalem! ef he's betrayed us to the Blackfeet I'll never have faith in human natur' arterwards."

"If he has betrayed us, we are lost!" cried Wright.

"I wish to thunder we were lost, so that the durned red-skins couldn't find us, anyhow!" returned the trapper, with one of his good-natured grins.

"What is to be done?"

"Play the fox an' sneak fur our lives. I've showed fight to-night, which is kinder onnatural fur me; now I'll try t'other way. The Blackfeet have felt my teeth, an' I s'pect they'll raise kingdom come when they find that dead Injun; so now I'll show 'em a bit of beaver cunnin'."

"What is to be done with the horses?" asked Wright.

"We've got to leave 'em to shift fur themselves. Thar ain't any red Injun in the hull North-west can catch my leetle animile; she knows enough to stay right round hyer, an' p'raps your hoss will keep mine company. Anyways, we've got to try shank's mare jist now," replied the trapper.

"What is your plan?"

"You know I've trapped considerable on this ere river, an' thar ain't an inch of it from whar it takes its rise in Old Rocky to whar it runs into the Columbia that I don't know. Wal, up hyer, about ten miles, is what is called the Great Cañon; the Blackfeet run me through the cañon last spring—that's the time they captivated the peltries, that they traded down at the fort, cuss 'em, for powder an' lead. That time I run through the cañon I dodged the red heathens slick. You see, in the cañon I diskivered a little cave; I hid in it an' the red suckers never found me, though they were a-howlin' all 'round me. Now, we'll jist put for that air hole in the hill, an' jist throw the savages off the track."

"Will they not follow our trail?"

"Let 'em!" cried Sol, scornfully. "I reckon I ain't bin a trapper in these hyer regions fur nothin'. Wait till we strike the Flathead river an' I'll bother the keenest-nosed red-skin that ever smelt out a trail."

"But Courtney?"

"Jes' you let us git out of this hobbles, an' I'll snake him out of the Blackfoot village as quick as a wink. Ef I don't, jist you put me to bed with a rattlesnake an' let him tickle me to death with his tail."

The trapper then released the horses—patting the neck of his own little pony as he did so, as much as to say, "good-by." This done, the

twain took their rifles and provision-pouches, and struck off through the wilderness in a north-western direction. After a tramp of about two hours they struck the valley through which flowed the waters of the Flathead river.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TURTLE BECOMES AN EAGLE.

By the time the old trapper and Wright arrived at the bank of the river, the moon was up full in the heavens, and shed its clear, pure light down upon the turbid waters of the Flathead.

"The cañon is 'bout a half a mile up-stream; the Injun village is 'bout four miles above that; the cave we're arter is right at the mouth of the cañon. You see the river hyer flows over a rocky bed, an' it ain't deep; all we've got to do is to wade up-stream to the cave, an' ef the red heathens kin foller our trail, they kin jist take my pile, they kin," said the guide, with one of his quaint smiles.

"But, will they not follow our tracks to the river's bank?" asked Wright.

"Sartin!" quietly answered the trapper.

"Will they not suspect that we have gone up the stream."

"What in thunder's to make 'em?" asked Sol. "Aint it more likely that we should go down the stream instead of up right into their clutches? Now, this is my plan: The red devils will foller our trail, trace it to the river, conclude, in course, that we've gone down-stream, an' go arter us like all git out; an' all the time we'll be lyin' snug, right under their noses."

"Your plan is excellent," cried Wright.

"Jes' so; guess I ain't trapped beavers onto this ere stream for nothing; but, let's be going; time's short, life is sweet, an' if we want to keep our top-knots jist whar they air now, we won't be slow in gittin' up this hyer river."

So, into the river Sol went, followed by Wright. A toilsome, difficult march was that little half-mile up the rocky bed of the river—the water now up to their ankles, and then rising suddenly to their waists.

At last the march was ended, and the two stood within the gloomy cave; the entrance to the cavern was a small hole, some three feet in circumference, hidden by branches and clumps of bushes, so that no one, without close examination, could have discovered the secret hiding-place.

Within the cavern was a small apartment, possibly six feet square.

"What do you think of this?" asked Sol, as they entered the retreat.

"Excellent!" replied Wright. "It will probably save our lives."

"That's so," replied the trapper, earnestly.

"Without this we'd be gone-up suckers, sure; but, how the red niggers diskivered us is a mystery."

"Can the Indian Mudhole, have betrayed us?" asked Wright.

"Wal, I don't know," said Sol, thoughtfully. "The critter owed a great deal to me. Ef he has betrayed us the motive must have been a powerful one."

"Does Mudhole know of the existence of this place?" asked Wright.

"No," answered the trapper, confidently; "hisn't known to any living soul 'sides myself, that I knows on. I diskivered it by accident. Hyer we're safe. I'm a-goin' to take a leetle scout 'round the Injun village, jist to see what I kin diskiver. I have an idee that the White Wolf went back to the village arter leaving the big Injun as scout—the feller that I stuck—fur to git his warriors an' go fur us. If my idee is right, then the best time for me to sneak the boy out of the Injun village will be to-night, when the Injuns are away onto the war-path ag'in us. So, while they air huntin' us I'll jist risk a visit right into their village, an' p'raps I kin git the young feller out of his pesky scrape—that is, ef he ain't hurt too bad."

"Go, then, in heaven's name!" cried Wright.

"I will await your return here."

"Jes' so; but don't show the end of your nose outside of the cave, fur the red devils will be all 'round us 'fore morning."

"I shall be careful."

"I shall be back in 'bout four hours," added Sol. "I've got to keep my wits 'bout me or I shall go plum into the clutches of these red heathens afore I know it. Ef by any accident the sarpints do diskiver the cave, why, you've got the three rifles, an' as only one man at a time can git into the hole, you kin fight half a hundred of the beasts without much trouble." Then the trapper crawled through the opening, stepped into the river and commenced his perilous scout.

We will leave Wright to enjoy the solitude of the cave, to watch eagerly from the mouth of the surface of the moonlit river and the dense forest that shaded the opposite bank for evidence of the savage foe, and follow the footsteps of the giant trapper as he went on his dangerous expedition, the object of which was to rescue the hapless Courtney from the power of the Blackfeet.

The trapper proceeded cautiously up the water-course, after leaving the cave, keeping as he went within the shadow of the rocks that overhung the turbulent stream. He proceeded for half a mile or so in the river-bed, then, selecting a favorable spot for his purpose, where the rocks opened and a ravine appeared, he left the water and plunged through the ravine into the forest.

"These rocks don't show footprints, thank goodness!" muttered Sol, as he looked back on the border of the woods to the rocky pathway over which he had come.

"Now for the Injun village," he cried to himself, as he plunged within the thicket. "I declare to goodness, if I can't do any thing else, I'll git into the corral an' set all the hosses loose; the beasts will raise a precious row gallopin' over the village. I've got to git even with these 'ere Blackfeet upon that air peltry business, do their copper-colored skins, the eternal heathen."

After an hour's tramp, Sol slackened his pace and began to proceed more cautiously. His judgment had told him that he was drawing near the village. Cautiously he proceeded. Presently he heard the barking of a dog—a sure sign that the Indian encampment was near at hand.

The brave man proceeded with increased caution. A few steps more and the trapper found himself on the edge of the timber. Before him was a little open plain, washed on one side by the Flathead river, while the dense woods surrounded it on the other three.

In the plain the moon's bright rays shone down upon the rude encampment. The trapper, from his ambush in the bushes at the edge of the timber, gazed upon the village of White Wolf.

"Now, how in thunder shall I diskiver in which air wigwam the young feller is shut up?" said Sol, as his eyes rested upon the Indian lodges.

We will leave the trapper in his ambush and penetrate to the interior of the village.

In the center of the settlement stood the "council-lodge," where the chiefs met for deliberation. Near the council-lodge was a wigwam, a little larger than the rest that composed the encampment; this was the wigwam of the chief of the tribe—the lodge of the White Wolf.

In the lodge of the chief stood two warriors. The lodge being dimly lighted by a little wick burning in a vessel of grease, we can see the forms and faces of the two Indians. One of the chiefs was the White Wolf, the other was the Indian who had shared the fortunes of the Giant Trapper—he who was called, in derision, by the settlers of Fort Benton, Mudhole, but who was—as our readers have doubtless guessed—in reality, Spotted Elk, the outcast Blackfoot brave, the only son of the White Wolf, and who, but for his guilty passion for the squaw of the Gray Eagle, would one day have been the chief of the Blackfeet of the Flathead valley.

"The cursed white-skins are in the Flathead valley," said Mudhole, or, as we shall hereafter call him, Spotted Elk.

"Yes," responded the White Wolf, "the chief has seen them. The young white brave is now a prisoner in the wigwam of the Blackfoot. When the sun comes, the rest of the white chiefs will be slain and their scalps will dry in the wigwams of the braves of the Blackfeet."

"But, the White Wolf gave his word that the white trapper, Longlegs, should not die," said the Spotted Elk.

"The White Wolf's tongue is straight, not forked; he speaks truth!" replied the chief, proudly.

"Then Longlegs shall not die?" questioned the Spotted Elk.

The chief did not answer. Evidently he wished to evade the question, for, after a few moments' silence, he spoke:

"There was once a young eagle; he was strong and proud of limb; he sought the nest of the hawk; from the nest he was hurled to the earth; he became a mud-turtle, and crawled in the mire."

The Spotted Elk understood the meaning of the old chief; he knew that the White Wolf referred to him.

"It is true," the young Indian answered, slowly, "the eagle is now a mud-turtle; the Great Spirit has willed it; but, when he dies he will sing the death-song of the Blackfeet."

"Would not the mud-turtle like to be an eagle again?" questioned the old chief.

"Wah! It is impossible!" answered the Spotted Elk, slowly and sadly.

"The Gray Eagle's brother died last night," said the White Wolf. "He has no kindred in the tribe of the Blackfeet; if the White Wolf brings the Spotted Elk into the council-lodge of the Blackfeet as his son, what chief will dare to lift up his voice against the chief of his tribe?"

"And will the White Wolf do this?" asked the Spotted Elk, eagerly.

"The mud-turtle shall become an eagle on one condition."

"Well?" asked the young chief.

"The White Wolf has said that the white chief, Longlegs, shall not die; it is bad; the beaver-catcher hunts in the valley of the Flathead, the land of the Blackfeet; he kills the beaver and the muskrat; the animals that swim in the Flathead river belong to the Blackfeet; the white trapper must die."

"The White Wolf would have his pledge returned?" asked the Spotted Elk.

"Yes; then he will take the Spotted Elk by the hand; he will conduct him to the council-lodge of the Blackfeet; he will say to the chiefs and warriors of the Blackfoot nation, 'this is my son, the future eagle of his tribe,' and what warrior will dare say 'nay'?"

For a moment there was silence in the little lodge. The Spotted Elk was deep in thought. If he returned the pledge of the old chief he would sacrifice the life of the white trapper—the man who had protected him when he was an outcast and a wanderer, but it would restore him to his old position among the warriors of the Blackfeet. The temptation was too great; he could not resist it. To regain his former station he would have given his life; besides, the thought flashed rapidly through his brain, the old trapper was not captured yet; the chances were that he would manage to elude the search of the Blackfeet and escape them. The Indian knew full well the craft and cunning of the Giant Trapper; he felt assured he would escape the Indians; therefore, even if he retained the promise of the White Wolf, it might not aid the trapper; it could only aid him in case he fell into the hands of the Blackfeet, and that they would capture him was doubtful.

At last the Spotted Elk spoke.

"Good! the Spotted Elk returns the promise of the White Wolf; the white trapper shall die by the hands of the Blackfoot warriors."

"The mud-turtle shall become an eagle again," returned the old chief. "The warriors of the Blackfeet are now in council; the White Wolf will present his son to them and they shall honor him."

Then, with a stately step, the White Wolf conducted the outcast warrior to the council-lodge of the Blackfeet.

All the chief warriors of the Blackfoot tribe, then in the village—as, at the time we write, the majority of the braves were away on the annual hunting-expedition southward—were assembled in the council-lodge, waiting the coming of their chief.

The White Wolf entered the council-lodge; behind him came the Spotted Elk; the assembled warriors, despite the usual stolid expression that they assume in the council-lodge, looked upon the face of the young brave—who for three years had been an outcast and a wanderer from the tribe of his fathers—with astonishment.

The old chief paused in the center of the council-lodge; each eye was bent upon him; each ear listened attentively for his words.

"Warriors of the Blackfeet," began the old chief, looking around with a majestic glance, "the White Wolf is a great chief; he does not fear the bear when he comes from the big mountains; his arm is strong and his heart large; he is the chief of the Blackfeet that live in the valley of the Flathead. Once he had a son; the big clouds sometimes cover the moon; when the clouds go the moon shines again; so the clouds covered the son of the White Wolf; but now the clouds are gone. The Spotted Elk is as cunning as the beaver; he has led the white trapper, Longlegs, and his braves into the valley of the Flathead; their scalps will hang in the lodge of a Blackfoot. Will my brothers say that the clouds are gone forever, and smoke the pipe of peace with the Spotted Elk?"

For a moment there was silence in the council-lodge of the Blackfeet. As the White Wolf had said, all the kindred of the warrior killed

by the Spotted Elk were dead; there was no one to revive the charge against the young brave; and in the savage assembly, as in the courts of justice of the civilized white man, wealth and high connections sometimes have great weight.

For a few moments the dead silence continued within the council-lodge. Then an old chief arose; he was one of the oldest and bravest warriors in the tribe—a man of very great influence; on his words hung the doom of the Spotted Elk.

"The words of the White Wolf have fallen upon the ears of the Blackfeet braves like the spring rain upon the ground: they have sunk in deep," began the old chief. "Why should the red warriors remember what is bad, and forget what is good?"

A hum of assent from the circle of braves announced their concurrence in the words of the old Indian; evidently the verdict of the council would be favorable to the Elk.

"The Spotted Elk is a big warrior; he is worthy to be the chief of the Blackfeet; let my brothers forget the past and think only of the future. The long-legged trapper, the beaver-catcher, is again in the Flathead valley; his scalp must hang in the lodges of the Blackfeet. Let my brothers smoke the pipe of peace and then hunt the white-skins to their death."

A grunt of approbation greeted the old warrior as he sat down.

And so the Spotted Elk, with the blood of the Gray Eagle upon his hands, was received back again into his tribe; the outcast was a wanderer no longer.

The council ended; the warriors filed out of the council-lodge, and, led by the White Wolf and the Spotted Elk, took the war-trail against the whites.

The warriors glided like so many specters in the moonlight, through the Indian village, down the slope that led to the river, and crossing it, disappeared in the dense thicket on the opposite bank.

Before crossing the river, the White Wolf called the Young Bear to him, and, much to that warrior's disgust, for he longed to join the war-party, he gave him directions to remain at the village and watch the prisoner, Courtney. The word of the chief was law; and, though the young chief in his heart might grumble at the office to which he had been assigned, yet, outwardly, Indian-like, he manifested no disappointment.

The Young Bear beheld the warriors depart, and then took up his station in front of the lodge in which was confined the hapless Courtney.

When the Blackfoot braves arrived on the opposite bank of the river, the White Wolf divided the party into three detachments. One he took command of himself; the second he gave to the charge of the Spotted Elk; the third to the command of the old Indian who had made the speech in the council-lodge, and who was called Tall Thunder.

To both the chiefs the White Wolf gave full instructions. The Blackfoot chief expected that the whites might have left the camping-ground they had selected; he had divided the warriors into three detachments that they might more easily discover the trail of the whites or the Indian scout that he had left to track the whites.

Little did the Blackfoot chieftain guess that the stout warrior that he had left in the thicket, was now cold in death—that the keen steel of the white trapper, the "beaver-catcher," as the Blackfeet called him, had drank the life-blood of the Tall Bull.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF THE INDIAN VILLAGE.

ONCE again Courtney held in his arms the soft and yielding form of the fair young Indian girl; but, how different now was his situation from that in which he had been placed when they had first met at Fort Benton! Then he was free, able to defy the malice of any foe; now he was a prisoner in the hands of the Blackfeet—the fierce savages of the North-west—his life scarcely worth an hour's purchase.

But, his helpless situation, the knowledge that death might come at any moment from the ruthless hands of the savages, were all forgotten in the one sweet moment when he, for the second time, held the White Bird in his arms, and felt her form quiver beneath his passionate embrace.

"You are in danger!" murmured the girl.

Then over his mind came the thought of what, indeed, was his position—a prisoner, helpless in the hands of his foe.

"Yes, dear one," he answered, "I am in danger."

"And your friends?" questioned the girl.

"I know nothing of their fate. The savages came upon me suddenly and stunned me with a blow on the head; after that, I know nothing. When I came to my senses I found myself here, a prisoner, your arms around me, your greeting ringing in my ears."

"You must be saved!" she cried.

"I must, indeed, or die a miserable death," he answered.

"Where did you leave your friends? Can you describe the place?" asked the girl.

"Yes, I think I can," answered the young man. "I left my companions by the side of a little stream that empties into the Flathead river, coming from the east—"

"Bitter stream!" cried the girl. "I know it. Will your companions remain there?"

"No, I think not," he answered; "they intended to come to the Flathead river, I think. They wished to be near this village. There is something here that they want."

"Do you know what it is?" she said, looking into the face of the young man with a strange expression.

"No; only that it is a treasure, and my companion thinks it is very valuable," said the young man.

"I know what it is," said the girl.

"You do?" cried Courtney in astonishment.

"Yes; but the value your companion sets upon it, I can not understand," replied the Indian girl. "Were it you, now, who set so high a value upon it, I should not wonder at it."

"You speak in riddles," said Courtney, astonished at her words. "I can not understand you."

"You will, soon," she replied. "If you were free from here, do you think you could find your companions?"

"Yes, I think so; I would follow the river down to where the little stream runs into it, then follow the stream up; that would lead me to where we were encamped. But I fear that my friends are in the hands of the Indians also."

"No," replied the girl; "if they were prisoners, they would be here. Besides, the great chief, the White Wolf, had but few braves with him—no match for the cunning 'beaver-catcher.'"

"You mean the Giant Trapper?" said the young man.

"Yes, Longlegs, as the Blackfeet call him," answered the girl.

"True, the old trapper will not fall into their hands as easy as I did. But can you free me?" he said.

"Yes; I love you and I will save you. I will untie the things that bind you, will bring you a blanket, and, in the dark, conduct you through the village," said the Indian maid.

"I shall owe you my life!" he cried, pressing her again and again to his heart, and covering her face with his warm, passionate kisses.

"You will love me?" questioned the girl.

"Yes; I shall love you always!" answered her lover.

At that moment the quick ear of the Indian girl caught the sound of footsteps passing by the lodge. Quickly she sprang to the door, and cautiously pulling aside the skin that served as a screen, looked out upon the village. She saw that the footsteps were caused by the Indian warriors passing by the wigwam and going into the council lodge. This fact discovered, she returned to the side of her lover and told what she had seen.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"The White Wolf must have returned, and the braves are holding a council," she replied.

"Does not that denote that they are about to go on the war-path?" he questioned.

"Yes; the White Bird will listen to the council of the braves; then she can tell their plans."

"That is an excellent idea!" cried Courtney.

"Let me replace the things on your wrists, so that, if any of the chiefs look into the lodge, they will not suspect."

So the White Bird bound the wrists of Courtney again with the deer-skin thongs; then, with a farewell kiss, she left his side and stepped from the lodge into the open air. With a light step she took her way, not to the council lodge, but in a direction exactly opposite; but, when she reached the outside of the little circle of lodges, she turned, and describing with her course a semicircle, she gained the back of the council-house, where she was concealed from all observation by the shadow thrown by the wigwam.

With the little knife hanging at her girdle she cut a hole in the skins that formed the sides of the wigwam, through which aperture she could both

see and hear all that passed within the council-lodge.

She was an attentive listener to the scene already described. Then, after the council was finished, she saw the chiefs depart on the war-trail against the whites, and in her heart she rejoiced, for the warriors had left the village almost unguarded, and she thought that she could easily save her lover. But, judge of her dismay, when she saw the Young Bear return at the command of the White Wolf and take up a position in front of the lodge that held her lover, a prisoner! Here was an unexpected obstacle. To get Courtney from the wigwam, with the young savage keeping watch before it, was difficult if not impossible; yet the attempt must be made. The war-party might return at any moment, and then her lover's life would be in danger.

A moment she thought; then, a plan came into her mind, by means of which she might free the prisoner from the hands of the Blackfeet.

With a loitering step the White Bird walked down toward the river, taking a course that would lead her directly by the lodge that held Courtney.

The Indian on guard, the Young Bear, beheld the Indian girl approaching; he was not sorry, for, in his heart he had a secret liking for the White Bird, but, being a young warrior, with very little renown and no great deeds on the war-path to boast of, he had not dared to lift his eyes to the young beauty, the daughter of the great Blackfoot chief, the White Wolf—for she was indeed the daughter of that renowned warrior.

"Has the White Bird seen the pale-face chief?" he asked, as the girl came by him.

"Yes," she answered; "but the pale chief was asleep; is he awake now?"

"I will wake him," exclaimed the young brave, glad of an opportunity to please the maiden.

So, into the lodge went the Young Bear, followed by the girl.

"Wah! pale-face!" cried the warrior, in English, it being the only English he knew.

Courtney turned on the couch as if awaking.

"Leave me your blanket to rest on, while I talk to the white-skin," said the White Bird.

Gladly the young brave spread the blanket on the earth-floor of the wigwam, and then withdrew to resume his watch. He knew that the White Bird understood the strange language of the pale-faces, and could talk to the white man.

"White Bird?" said Courtney.

"Yes; I have returned," said the girl. "Do not fear; speak freely; the young brave who keeps watch does not understand your tongue."

"He is watching me, then?"

"Yes."

"Then there is little chance of my escape."

"You shall be free before the moon is two hours older," said the girl.

"How can I escape his notice?"

"I have a plan," she answered. "There are but few warriors in the village; the White Wolf has taken the trail to hunt your friends to death. You have been betrayed by the Indian that I warned you not to trust in the white settlements by the Big river."

"Mudhole!" exclaimed Courtney. "He then has given us into the hands of the Blackfeet."

"Yes," answered the girl. "His right name is Spotted Elk; he is the son of the White Wolf, my father."

"What?" cried Courtney, in astonishment.

"You are the daughter of the White Wolf, and yet you love me?"

"Yes; and I will save you from the Blackfeet. See this blanket," she said, pointing to the one left by the young chief. "I will decoy the brave away from the door of the lodge; then you put on the blanket, walk through the door, and cross the little open space into the thicket beyond; there leave the blanket and I will join you, then guide you to a place of safety."

"You are my guardian angel!" cried the young man.

"Be ready. I will take the brave away."

Then the Indian girl left the lodge, first removing the things that bound Courtney.

"Will the Young Bear walk with me to the river?" asked the girl.

The young brave hesitated.

"I am to guard the prisoner," he replied.

"The prisoner is bound hand and foot; he cannot move; he is wounded, too; what then should you fear?"

What the girl said was true, he knew; there was little danger of the wounded prisoner's es-

caping. So, without further reluctance, he signified his willingness to accompany the girl. The simple-hearted red-skin only yielded to the same fascination that stripped from the Roman Antony his share of the imperial city. The Indian brave was not the first man to yield to the subtle lures of womankind.

Courtney watched from the door of the lodge the departure of the girl and the warrior; then, when he judged them to be at a safe distance, and that the time had come to attempt to escape, he hastily wrapped the blanket around him and boldly stalked forth from the lodge, crossed the little open space and gained the welcome shelter of the thicket. In the thicket he dropped the blanket and extended himself at full length in the bushes, to await the coming of the Indian girl.

The White Bird and the young Indian warrior walked slowly down toward the river. Arriving at the bank, the girl paused.

"Does the Young Bear know where the rattlesnake tree (the white ash) grows by the bank of the river?"

(Among the Indian tribes of the North-west, the twigs of the white ash are believed to have the power to charm the rattlesnake.)

"Yes," replied the brave; "a big walk from the village."

"No; the Young Bear is swift. What brave of the Blackfoot tribe can outrun the young warrior? The Young Bear will bring the White Bird the twigs of the rattlesnake tree!" And the girl bent her large, dark eyes full upon the face of the warrior. What mortal man, red or white, could refuse? The delicate compliment pleased the Indian, but duty made one last effort.

"But the prisoner?" he stammered.

"The White Bird will watch for the Young Bear," said the girl, with another bewitching glance of her dark eyes.

"It is good," replied the Young Bear; "the chief will go; and with a long, loping stride, up the river went the warrior."

The girl watched him for a moment, then quickly retraced her steps, but instead of going to the lodge, she sought the thicket opposite, where she found Courtney awaiting her.

"I have blinded the eyes of the young warrior, for some little time; you are safe," she cried.

"Thanks to you; you have preserved me!" exclaimed Courtney.

"But for a little time only; the warrior will soon return, then your absence may be discovered at any moment," replied the girl.

"What shall I do?—endeavor to join my friends by the little stream, or—"

"No, no!" cried the White Bird, anxiously; "do not go there; the red braves are even now thick in the forest. Should you meet them, they will kill you without mercy. Ah!" and the girl started suddenly, as though bitten by a snake.

"What is the matter?"

"Hush!" said the girl, listening. "Did you not hear something?"

For a moment Courtney listened attentively, but his ear caught nothing but the usual sounds of the forest.

"I can not hear any thing, he said at length.

"But I did," responded the girl, still listening.

"It sounds as though some one moved in yonder thicket."

"Might it not have been a bird or some small animal?" asked the young man. His hearing was not as acute as that of the Indian maid, trained from childhood to the noises of the wilderness.

"No," answered the girl, with a shake of the head; "the noise I heard was human, not bird or animal. Hush! 'tis there again!" and she pointed to a dense cluster of bushes some ten feet from the spot where they stood. "'Tis a foe, he shall die!" and with the lightning dash of the tiger, the Indian girl drew the little knife from her girdle and bounded toward the thicket.

Then from the coppice rose the figure of a man, and disclosed to the astonished eyes of Courtney the person of the old trapper.

"Hold on, you female wildcat!" he cried, in a cautious voice; "don't you prod me with that air toad-sticker!"

"Longlegs!" cried the Indian girl.

"Jes so!" coolly replied the trapper; "that's what your dod-rotted relations christen me!"

It was the trapper indeed. Patiently he had waited in his ambush for some opportunity to enter the town, but none had presented itself; still he waited, hoping against hope. He had seen the departure of the Indians and the escape of Courtney, who, as luck would have it, had entered the thicket near his hiding-place.

"How long have you been here?" asked the young man.

"Nigh onto two hours, I reckon," replied the trapper.

"Why did you not discover yourself to me before?" Courtney asked.

"Wal, I didn't know as you'd expect to see a friend hyer, in the bush, an' I thought likely ef I jumped up on you sudden, you mought have took me fur an Injun, an' gone fur me jist as that air gal was a-goin' to."

"Where's your companion?" asked the girl.

"Safe as a bug in a rug!" exclaimed the trapper.

"Can you conceal yourself and him?"—she referred to Courtney—"so that the Blackfeet can not discover you?"

"You bet!" cried the trapper, emphatically. "I kin hide him whar all the red Injuns of the North-west wouldn't find him."

"You will go with him, then," said the girl to Courtney.

"And you?" cried Courtney, "will you not go with me?"

"To-night, no; to-morrow, yes," answered the girl.

"Why not to-night?" questioned Courtney.

"If I remain in the village I can discover whether the Indians will search for you, and what plan they will form to capture you; then I can come and tell you, and you can avoid them."

"The gal speaks sense, by hookey!" cried the trapper; "let her have her own way; she knows best."

"Do as you think best, for heaven's sake!" cried Courtney; "but, be careful of your life; when and where shall I see you again?"

"To-morrow night, the place—"

"Ef I might suggest, ma'm," said the old trapper, "you had better let me come fur you. I'm used to the woods an' he ain't."

"You speak wisely," said the girl. "Where shall I meet you?"

"Right hyer, on this 'ere spot. I guess they won't expect to find 'Longlegs,' as they call me, so nigh their wigwams," said the trapper, with a quiet chuckle.

"It is good," replied the Indian girl. "To-morrow night, then, when the sun goes down and the spirit lights begin to shine, you will be here."

"Bet your life onto it, every time!" said Sol, with one of his peculiar grins, for the old trapper was in high spirits at the thought of baffling the Blackfeet.

"Good-by," said the girl, looking into her lover's face with a longing look of her large, dark eyes; "do not fear; the White Bird will count the hours till she sees your face again."

A moment Courtney held her in his arms; their lips met in a farewell kiss, and then the Indian girl, taking the blanket that had disguised the young man, returned again to the little lodge.

"Perhaps I have seen her for the last time—perhaps my lips never again will touch her soft cheek," cried Courtney, as the figure of the Indian girl was hid from his gaze by the walls of the lodge.

"Cheer up! Hope fur the best!" cried the old trapper, in a lively tone. "The gal's a tramp, every time! I shouldn't mind captivating a critter like her myself. But, come, we've got a few miles to tramp afore we're safe from the red devils."

The trapper struck out a path through the thicket, and Courtney, after a farewell glance at the little lodge which had held him a prisoner, but now concealed only the slight form of the White Bird, the Flower of the Blackfeet, turned and followed him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TREASURE WORTH FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS.

On through the forest with a long, steady stride went the trapper, closely followed by Courtney. As near as he could calculate, Sol took the same path returning to the river that he had trod in coming from it to the Indian village. So closely had the man calculated, that, after a long, tedious tramp through the wood, they struck the river at the little ravine that we have before mentioned.

The two crossed the rocks and entered the stream.

"Be keerful an' pick your way, else you'll go ker-souse inter some big pool," was the trapper's caution, as they commenced their journey down the stream.

"Why do you go through the water? Why not go by the river-bank?" asked the young man.

"It is much better traveling there than here."

"Sartin!" replied the trapper, with a quiet chuckle at the young man's ignorance of woodcraft; "but, s'pose the red heathen foller us? They kin track us easy from the village to the river, but, at the river our footprints stop; nary sign is there of the way we've gone; but ef we were to go on the bank they could track us clean to our hidin'-place, an' the chances would be that our handsome top-knots would hang an' dry in the smoke of some big Injun's lodge."

"True," replied Courtney; "I own I am no woodman. I should be as one lost in this wilderness, were I alone."

"Jes' so; but I reckon I know every stick of timber, every foot of ground, an' every inch of water 'tween hyer an' the Columbia river," said the trapper.

After a weary march, our adventurers reached the mouth of the little cave; into it, much to Courtney's astonishment, Sol conducted him.

"Hyer we air, safe from any painted heathen that runs on the top of the airth in this 'ere region," cried Sol, as they stood within the little cave.

Wright greeted Courtney and Sol warmly; he had given up all hopes of ever again seeing the young man.

Courtney briefly related his adventures since he parted with his companions by the banks of the little stream. Wright listened attentively.

"For the present, then, we are in safety!" Wright exclaimed.

"You bet! Don't you worry 'bout the Injuns, they'll never find us, 'cept through accident. We'll jist stay hyer till to-morrow night; then I'll go up to the village, git the leetle gal, an' arter that we'll git out of the Injun country as fast as we kin. But, boys, the question is, how thar's goin' to be done?"

"Wait here, I suppose, until the Indians have given over the pursuit, then make our way back the best way we can," said Wright.

"Then you've given up your idee of goin' into the Injun village?" asked the old trapper.

"To attempt to carry out my plan at present would be madness. The Indians are alarmed; they know of our being in the neighborhood; to penetrate to their village now and secure the treasure that I am in search of, would be clearly impossible; indeed, I think we shall be lucky if we succeed in saving ourselves from the savages," replied Wright.

"Thar's a heap of truth in what you say," said Sol, gravely. "We air in a pesky mess, an' thar's no two ways 'bout it. Our top-knots air in danger, you bet!"

"But, by the way, Wright," said Courtney, suddenly, "you have never told us *what* it is that you seek in this Indian village. What treasure is there in the lodges of the Blackfeet worth fifty thousand dollars?"

"Fifty thousand dollars!" cried Sol, in astonishment. "I wouldn't give fifty thousand cents for the hull dog-goned Blackfoot nation, cuss thar copper-colored sun-tanned hides!"

"Neither would I," quietly observed Wright; "yet there is a treasure in yonder little Indian village that, if I had it in St. Louis, would surely be worth fifty thousand dollars to me."

"Explain, Wright, and tell us what it is," said Courtney.

"Well, since I have failed in my plan, I will answer your inquiries; and, after I have explained, you will see that my scheme for making fifty thousand dollars was not a visionary one, and but for the savages discovering us, my adventure would probably have been successful; but I must first speak of the past before I tell of the present."

"My story commences some twenty years ago. At that time a man named Samuel Curtis lived in St. Louis. St. Louis then was deeply engaged in the fur trade. This Curtis was a wealthy fur merchant, was about fifty years old, and had a son, a wild young fellow, possessing none of the father's steadiness. Curtis the elder had amassed a large fortune—report said that he was worth fifty or sixty thousand dollars. To this fortune his son, William, was of course the sole heir. Judge then of the father's astonishment and disgust—for he was a man of great pride and hauteur—when his only son, the heir to all this vast property, married a poor sewing-girl not worth a single penny. When the news of his boy's marriage came to his ears, the rage of the old man knew no bounds. He closed his doors at once against his own child and his beggarly bride, as he termed the wife, whose solo offense was that she was poor; in every other respect she was fitted to become the wife of a far better man than the wild, reckless William Curtis. Friends interceded for the young couple, but their intercession was useless. The father declared that the girl had entrained

his boy into a marriage for the sake of the money that he would one day possess, and he swore a bitter oath that not one dollar of his fortune should ever go into her hands."

"Why, the hard-hearted old cuss!" cried Sol, indignantly, "to turn ag'in his own flesh an' blood fur a little bit of dirty money! I'm durned ef money ain't fur from bein' a blessin' sometimes."

"Very true," returned Wright, "but to go on with my story. For a time the son and his wife struggled along in St. Louis. The father was to them as an utter stranger. At last, wearied by his fruitless struggle for life—for young Curtis did not possess the iron will and nerve of his father—he left St. Louis with his wife, and threw his fortunes with a train of emigrants for the North-west. When the father was told of the resolve and departure of his boy, he showed no signs of forgiveness. 'He has chosen his bed; let him lie on it,' was his cold reply to those who again ventured to intercede for the young people."

"Curtis, with his wife, proceeded with the emigrants to their settlement on the upper Missouri; then, attracted by the gold discoveries in California, he left his wife and struck across the plains to try his fortunes in the mines. With him my story has nothing more to do, as it is unknown what became of him. He never returned to his wife, and was supposed to have died in California."

"The wife remained in the little settlement where her husband had left her; a baby girl was born to her, and then, some fifteen years ago, when the child was four years old, she went with some friends to the then new settlement Elk City, though this was long before it had received that name. The wife, whose name was Delia, kept up a regular correspondence with her folks in St. Louis, and from them all these particulars were gained."

"Delia Curtis, with her little girl, had not lived a year in the new settlement, when the Blackfeet Indians commenced a fierce war upon the frontier settlements. Among other places, the little settlement of what is now Elk City was attacked and burnt to the ground; the inhabitants were murdered by the Indians or carried away into captivity; but few escaped to tell of the savage slaughter."

"Jes' so!" interrupted Sol. "I were one on the few."

"You were?" eagerly questioned Wright.

"I were," repeated Sol. "I knowed Mrs. Curtis an' the leetle gal; they lived right on the edge of the settlement, the fust house attacked by the red heathen."

"Yes," responded Wright, "so I was told by one of the survivors. Mrs. Curtis and her child were never seen after the Indian attack. Whether they were killed by the Indians or carried away captive, no one could tell."

"Wal, they wasn't killed, in the attack, that's a dead sure thing," said the old trapper, "cos I were one on the fellers that helped to bury the bodies; but the savages mought have knocked 'em on the head afterwards."

"After the departure of his son from St. Louis, old Mr. Curtis pursued his way through the world as usual. He was told, of course, of the supposed deaths of his son, his son's wife and daughter, and if the old man repented of his hardness, outwardly he made no sign. Years passed on; there was no one to institute a search for the lost woman and child, and the affair seemed buried from the world. Just about a year ago the old man Curtis died. On his death-bed he thought of his son and of his harsh treatment of that son, and in contrition repented of his conduct. There was no absolute proof that the mother and child were dead, nor, indeed of the death of William. But of that there was but little doubt. That the child might be living there were great hopes. So the old man made a will; the sum of ten thousand dollars he left to Roderick Wright of St. Louis, his confidential man of business, with an injunction that the ten thousand was to be expended in procuring proof of the existence or the death of the girl Delia, the daughter of his son William and his wife Delia; to that girl Delia, his granddaughter, he left the whole of his fortune. And there was another clause in the will, that if Roderick Wright succeeded in finding the missing heir, Delia Curtis, he was to be paid the sum of fifty thousand dollars."

"And you are the Roderick Wright mentioned in the will?" cried Courtney.

"Yes," replied Wright.

"I git your idee now," said the trapper. "You think that this leetle gal Delia is still alive, an' that she is in the Injun village up in the valley."

"Yes; for it was the White Wolf's band that attacked the settlement."

"Small chance of findin' her, I reckon," said the trapper.

"I think not—that is, if the savages hadn't discovered us. The first thing I did in St. Louis was to put an advertisement in the newspapers for information relating to the massacre at Elk City. Luckily, the very man who could give me the information I desired, saw my advertisement and answered it. The man was a neighbor of Mrs. Curtis, and saw the attack on her house; he also saw the woman and child carried away by the Indians."

"This gal, if living, would be about twenty years old now," said the trapper.

"Yes," replied Wright.

"Wal, bein' so young a gal when carried off, it's more than likely that the red heathen have brought her up as one of themselves, 'cos the leetle gal wouldn't be apt to remember much 'bout the white settlements."

"That is probable," said Wright.

"Then that's the fifty thousand dollars you are arter in the Injun village?" said the trapper.

"That is the prize."

"Mighty small chance of gittin' it now."

"I'm afraid so," responded Wright.

"But, even if you should find the girl, and be fully satisfied yourself that she is the one you seek, it seems to me that it would be a difficult matter to prove her identity in a court of law so that she could inherit the estate left her by the will," said Courtney.

"What you say is very true; but I have all the papers relating to her birth. The mother had an idea that the child might one day inherit some of her grandfather's estate, so she sent the papers to her relatives in St. Louis. The only difficult point is the question of identity. I would have to prove that the girl that I rescue from the hands of the Indians is the same one stolen by them at the massacre of Elk City fifteen years ago."

"Wal, I should say that air would be a knotty p'int to git round," observed the trapper, sagely.

"Not so difficult as you would think, thanks to the forethought of the mother of the girl. She, the mother, always had a thought that her daughter would some day be forgiven her parents' fault; but she was alone with the child in the wilds of the Far West; should she, the mother, die, the identity of the child might be lost; so, to guard her from the consequences of the very event that afterward did happen, the mother caused the name Delia Curtis to be pricked in India ink, sailor fashion, on the daughter's arm."

"Wal, that woman *had* sense," cried the trapper.

"Yes. The man who imprinted the name on the arm was the very man who answered my advertisement in St. Louis. So you see how easy it would be to prove the identity of the girl, for, of course, he can swear to his own work," replied Wright.

"And probably but for this unfortunate discovery of us by the Indians, you would have succeeded in your mission and found the lost heir," said Courtney.

"I think so."

"An' now you'll be lucky ef you git out of this 'ere valley with the ha'r on the top of your head," said Sol.

"It's all in a lifetime," replied Wright. "We can not always succeed."

"Jes' sol true as preaching; but I say, by hookey, I've got an idee. The leetle Injun gal—the White Bird, as they call her—is comin' tomorrow night to run off with Mister Courtney. From her you kin find out all 'bout the Injun gals, an' ef any one on 'em has got the mark on her arm, the chief's daughter will know it. Then, ef she is in the village, why you kin jist git up another party a heap bigger than this one, an' snake her out of the hands of the red heathen. What do you think of the idee?" asked the trapper.

"Very excellent, indeed. We should have succeeded this time but that the Indians by some means learned our intentions, and thus defeated our plans to surprise them," said Wright.

"It's that air dod-rotted Mudhole, the cussed red nigger! I wouldn't have believed it of the long-legged imp of Satan. I do think he's a Blackfoot. It's no use, a snake is a snake, an' an Injun is an Injun. I were a durned fool to trust him; but the best on us make mistakes sometimes."

"That's very true. Our present look-out is to get out of our scrape as well as possible," said Courtney.

"I kin do it!" said the trapper, emphatically; "ef I don't, jes' you bite my ears off an' use 'em for pin-cushions."

So for the present we will leave our heroes to meditate in the gloomy chamber of the little cave, while we return to the White Wolf and his Blackfoot warriors.

CHAPTER X.

LONGLEGS IN A DIFFICULTY.

SILENTLY through the forest went the Indian warriors.

The band headed by the White Wolf followed a course which would bring them directly to the spot where the Indian warrior, Tall Bull, had been stationed to watch the movements of the whites.

After a march of some two hours, the White Wolf, followed by his braves, entered the little glade where Courtney had been captured.

The White Wolf enjoined caution and silence upon his warriors, as he expected each moment, as he advanced, to come upon the camp of the whites.

Slowly the braves advanced, and suddenly the keen eyes of the White Wolf caught sight of the body of the Tall Bull, extended on the ground, whither he had been struck by the keen knife of the old trapper.

The White Wolf sprang to the side of the dead brave, and noted the gaping wound in his back.

"Wah!" he cried, in the Indian tongue; "the Tall Bull has gone to the happy hunting-grounds!"

The Indians crowded around the body. All examined anxiously the deep thrust that had let out the life of the warrior.

"The beaver-catcher has shown his teeth; the fox has become a bear," said the White Wolf, for he doubted not that the Indian warrior had fallen by the hand of the big trapper. "The Blackfoot will hunt the bear to his lair; he shall die before another moon shines over the Flat-head valley."

Then two of the braves, raising the body of the slain warrior, bore it away toward the Indian village.

One of the warriors, who had been examining the surrounding country, returned with the intelligence that he had discovered the trail of the whites.

Eager for vengeance, the red-skins took the trail. Despite the darkness the Indians readily followed the path pursued by the trapper and his companion.

Minutes lengthened into hours, and still the trail continued, until at last it came to a sudden stop on the rocky bank of the Flathead river.

White Wolf and his band halted, discomfited. "Wah!" cried the chief, in evident anger; "the cunning beaver-catcher has covered his trail; he is a great warrior who is both bear and fox at once."

Then, turning to his band, he said: "Let my warriors search the other bank for the steps of the cunning white-skins."

The Blackfoot warriors eagerly obeyed the orders of their chief, but the quest was vain; no trace on either bank of the river was there of the whites, thanks to the old trapper having taken the precaution to use the rocky ravine in leaving and approaching the river. Baffled and discouraged, the White Wolf called a halt. The trail of the whites had disappeared as utterly as though they had sunk into the ground.

The chief could but confess that the cunning trapper had beaten him; the Indian, trained from the cradle to the forest wilds, was no match in woodcraft for the long-legged beaver-catcher; but, stubborn to the end, he would not give up hope. The whites were in the valley somewhere; he felt sure of it. He therefore resolved to dispatch some of his warriors to picket the lower end of the valley; sooner or later the whites would attempt to escape and would fall into the hands of the Blackfeet.

The two parties, led by the Spotted Elk and Tall Thunder, by this time had joined the White Wolf. The party led by Tall Thunder, the Wolf dispatched to guard the entrance to the valley; the rest of the braves followed the Wolf as he returned to the Indian encampment.

All this marching and countermarching had taken time; the gloom of the night had long since gone, and the gray tints of the morning had been succeeded by the burning mid-day sun, when White Wolf and his warriors entered the Indian village.

The Wolf went at once to the lodge where the prisoner Courtney was confined, and in front of which sat the young Indian brave, Young Bear. That confiding youth had not troubled himself to look in upon his prisoner, so he was entirely ignorant of Courtney's es-

cape. The Wolf entered the lodge and found it empty. On the floor lay the deer-skin thongs with which the prisoner had been bound, cut into half a dozen pieces. A large slit through the skins that formed the back of the lodge, showed how the prisoner had escaped the vigilance of the Young Bear who guarded the lodge. Courtney had not been searched thoroughly when made a prisoner, and therefore that he might have had a knife concealed on his person, and by its aid that he had effected his escape, appeared reasonable to the Indians. Not even the Young Bear suspected that the Indian girl, White Bird, had any agency in the matter.

Again was the chief baffled, although in his heart he was not sorry for the escape of the young man; he remembered the time in the white settlement, when Courtney had stepped forward in his behalf, and the memory of the Indian for good or evil extends far beyond a day.

The White Wolf gave orders that the warriors should prepare for the war-path, for he had resolved again to set forth that night and search every nook and corner of the Flathead valley for traces of the whites.

Leaving the warriors preparing for the coming expedition, we will return to the fugitives hiding in the little cave by the river's side.

Gloomily the long day had passed to the whites nestling in the dark corners of the cavern that had been an ark of safety to them.

Sol, peeping warily forth from the cave's mouth, beheld the Indians scouting along on the other bank of the river.

"The pison sarpints are arter us, sure as shoot-in'," he observed, with a dry chuckle. "I reckon, though, the heathen won't be like to diskiver us."

Tranquilly in the snug retreat the whites remained, while the red warriors were searching up and down the river for their trail. Little did they suspect that the foe they sought was concealed beneath their very feet, for the scouting-party on that bank of the river where the little cave was situated, passed over it half a dozen times in their search.

Night came at last, descending slowly upon the surface of the turbid and swift-flowing waters. One by one, to the eyes of the watching whites, the trees on the opposite bank faded into the dense gloom, and where once their eyes rested upon the green forest, appeared now but an indistinct black wall. The night, too, promised, in contradiction to the preceding one, to be dark and cloudy; the moon was hid by the clouds that covered the sky. As the scout observed, in his quaint way:

"It's an all-fired good night for scouting."

"You will set out soon, will you not?" asked Courtney, filled with the anxiety so natural to a lover.

"Wal, I reckon it won't be long now afore I make a start of it. I s'pose you want to see the little gal, don't ye?" he asked, with a chuckle. The old trapper could read human nature as well as he could decipher the signs of the forest.

"Yes," replied Courtney, honestly. "I own I am anxious."

"Sartin; it's human natur'; but, don't hurry; I want to see jist how dark it's goin' to git afore I start. I reckon thar'll be some danger in goin' inter the Injun village to-night. The village jist now must be like a good-sized hornets' nest."

"Let me go with you if there is danger to be met!" impulsively exclaimed the young man.

"What in thunder would be the use of that?" cried the trapper. "It isn't fightin' that's got to be did; it's sneakin', an' one's a sight better nor two."

An hour or so more the old trapper waited, and then, after a careful scouting around the mouth of the cave, he essayed his desperate undertaking.

"Be careful!" cried Wright, as the trapper quitted the cave and stood within the running water of the stream.

"You bet!" was old Sol's rejoinder, as he started on his perilous journey. "Ef I git the leetle gal out of the Injun camp, an' then sneak the hull party out of the Injun country, it'll be something to boast of in my old age. It will be work, though," and the man shut his teeth firmly together as he walked on up the stream. Arriving at the rocky ravine, the trapper left the river, crossed the little rocky space and entered the thicket.

Cautiously and slowly he proceeded onward, stopping every now and then as he drew near to the encampment, and listening intently. All, however, was still within the forest; no sign

was there of human life. Onward still went the brave heart, till at last he reached the edge of the thicket and looked from the cover of the trees upon the Indian village. There, in contrast to the silence of the forest, all was life and activity. The Blackfeet were all astir. In the center of the village before the door of the council-lodge, a huge fire was burning, and around it the Blackfoot braves were dancing the war-dance.

The trapper understood well the meaning of the scene. He saw plainly that all the available force in the village were about to take the war-trail. The thought that the savages set such a high value upon his capture rather pleased the daring old forester.

"I'll keep my top-knot out of the bloody heathens' hands, ef I kin," he said to himself, as his eyes rested upon the dancing, howling Blackfeet. "I wonder whar the leetle gal is? Pooty near time she were a-lookin' fur me;" but no sign of the Indian girl could he see. As he looked from wigwam to wigwam, vainly striving to discover her, an Indian pony, that had evidently broken loose, followed by half a dozen yelling curs, and as many warriors in pursuit, dashed through the village and made directly for the spot where old Sol stood. The rush of the horse was so sudden that the animal and his howling followers were upon him before he could retreat. To attempt to do so, with the dogs and Indians so near him, would have been folly, so he sunk quietly to the ground, trusting to the tall grass to conceal him. In his heart the old trapper cursed the horse, the dogs, the men and the unlucky star that had brought them so near his hiding-place.

The horse was surrounded and caught within ten feet of the spot where the trapper lay, and Sol had just begun to hope he would escape, when one of the little Indian dogs smelt him out and plunged at him open-mouthed, barking fiercely. The rest of the dogs followed, and the Indians advanced to discover the cause of the dogs' alarm. The trapper felt as if his time had come. Already one of the braves was within six feet of him; flight was his only hope. His resolve was instantly taken. In a second the old trapper was on his feet and bounded off through the woods. A yell from the startled Indians greeted the sudden appearance. They knew the figure of the long-legged beaver-catcher right well, but that their foe should be lurking almost within the shadow of their wigwams struck them with astonishment.

On through the tangled underbrush rushed Sol, leaving here and there in the thorny bushes strips of his hunting shirt and leggings.

"By hooky!" cried he to himself, as a bush tore off a large strip from his sleeve. "I shall be naked as a new-born baby, of these cursed thorn-bushes air so durn' lovin'." I guess I kin outrun these heathen or I'm a sucker," and he threw a rapid glance over his shoulder to note the nearness of the foe. Fatal movement, for, at the same moment his foot caught, and headlong on the earth went the tall trapper. It was a moment or two before he could regain his feet, tangled up as they were in a network of briars. The Indians had closed in around him; no avenue of escape was open to him; the cold perspiration stood upon his forehead. One bold dash he made for life. Useless attempt! Fortune was against the white-skin, for again his foot caught in a vine, and again he fell prostrate upon the earth. Before he could rise, the red warriors threw themselves upon him. Vigorously old Sol struggled. Once, with almost superhuman strength, he threw his assailants off and gained his knee. The advantage, however, was but momentary, for again the red-skins threw themselves upon and bore him to the earth. The warriors had not tried to use their weapons, their object being to capture him alive. This the trapper well understood; they designed him for the torture-stake.

Overpowered by weight of numbers, old Sol, after a vigorous and determined struggle, was bound tightly, hand and foot, with the deer-skin girdles of the warriors. Then, utterly helpless in the hands of the savages, they raised him upon their shoulders and bore him in triumph toward the village—one of the swiftest runners having been dispatched in advance to apprise the Blackfeet that their great enemy, the white-skinned trapper, Longlegs, the beaver-catcher, the white chief that had so long defied their power, was now a prisoner helpless in their hands.

The thoughts of the prisoner were anything but pleasant as he was borne along on the shoulders of the exulting red-men.

"Cuss the luck!" he groaned to himself in

bitterness of spirit, "to be captivated by these hyer dog-rotted heathen! It makes my blood bile. I s'pose they'll roast or fry me at the torture-stake jist to see whether I am tough or tender—the eternal heathen!"

And so, on the shoulders of the braves who had by accident captured him, the beaver-catcher was carried into the village of his mortal enemies.

CHAPTER XI.

MUDHOLE'S FAITH.

ALARMED by the Indian runner, the whole of the inhabitants of the Blackfoot village assembled to witness the arrival of the daring white-skin who had so long defied the efforts of the best warriors of the Blackfoot tribe to kill or capture him. At last he was in their hands, a helpless prisoner.

Loud were the yells, wild was the delight, with which the Indians welcomed the successful warriors.

The prisoner was deposited in front of the council-lodge, in close proximity to the blazing fire; a fact which did not tend to make him feel easier in his mind.

The women and children crowded around him, with many a taunt and threat, till the White Wolf placed a cordon of warriors around him, and kept back the crowd. Then the high chiefs, headed by the White Wolf, sought the council-lodge, to decide as to the fate of the captive.

The women and children, kept back from the prisoner by the line of warriors, cursed him at a distance, but, as they spoke in the Indian tongue, of which the trapper understood not a word, their taunts and curses fell upon unheeding ears.

"I s'pose they'll burn me, durn 'em!" muttered the trapper, as he looked around upon the long line of hostile faces by which he was surrounded. "Ef they'd only give me a single chance at 'em, I'd clean out a few afore I go under. But, I ain't dead yit; I guess I'm as good as a dozen dead men. I've been as nigh as this to death afore, an' pulled through. Luck may turn an' give me a show; then let the red heathen look out."

From the crowd of women and children the young Indian girl, White Bird, soon appeared. She said a few words to one of the warriors who guarded the prisoner, when he readily let her pass, for few braves of the Blackfoot tribe cared to thwart the will of the daughter of their great chief.

The girl came straight to the side of the helpless man.

"The beaver-catcher is in danger," she said, in a low, sweet tone, speaking the English tongue with only a slight Indian accent.

"Wal, beauty," answered the old trapper, in his honest way, "I wouldn't mind givin' all I'm worth—it ain't much, though—to git out of this 'arnal scrape."

"Do not fear to speak freely," said the girl. "None of the warriors that guard you understand a word of your tongue."

"I wish they did, the durned heathen cusses," said the trapper, with rage in his tone. "They couldn't have captivated me ef they hadn't 'a' been twenty ag'in' one."

"You have lost your life for me," said White Bird, mournfully, while tears gathered in her dark eyes.

"Don't speak of it, beauty. We've all got to die some time. They'll probably gin me a taste of that air fire afore I'm an hour older."

The girl shuddered at the thought.

"Don't you mind 'bout me," said the trapper. "I'm old an' tough, an' I don't think they'll torment me much; so don't you worry 'bout me. Jist listen now, an' I'll tell you how you kin find the young feller. He an' his friend will need your help to git out of this spesky scrape, fur they'll never git out of it themselves. You know where the high gray rock overhangs the river, 'bout four miles from hyer down the stream?"

"Yes, Lover's Leap, it is called. A young Indian girl, whose father would not let her marry the brave she loved, jumped from the rock into the river, and perished in the dark waters," said the girl.

"Jes' so," said the trapper; "thar is considerable of a pool in the river jist thar. Wal, jist at the foot of that air rock is a leetle cave, the mouth of it all kivered up with bushes. In that air cave is the young feller an' his friend."

"I will remember your directions. I will save your friends from the Blackfeet, and conduct them safe through the forest to the white settlements; but, isn't there any thing that I can do for you?" asked the girl, earnestly.

"No, not at present, beauty," replied Old Sol.

"The chiefs are coming from the lodge," said the girl, suddenly, as she glided from the trapper.

As she had said, the chiefs, headed by the White Wolf, were coming from the council-lodge. Soon they gathered around the prisoner. At a motion of the White Wolf, the trapper was raised to a sitting position.

"Beaver-catcher," began the White Wolf, "the braves of the Blackfeet have sat in the council-lodge; they have talked of the fate of the long-legged trapper. The white-skin has caught the beaver and the muskrat in the waters of the Flathead; he has hunted in the valley of the Blackfeet, and on the war-path he has slain the Tall Bull, a great Blackfoot chief; his spirit looks down from the happy hunting-grounds and calls for vengeance on his pale-face murderer. The chiefs of the Blackfeet have decided that the beaver-catcher shall die at the torture-stake. Let the white-skin prepare, for death is near."

The chief had addressed the prisoner in the English tongue, which he spoke fluently.

The trapper moved not a single muscle when he learned his doom.

"Look hyer, chief," he cried, "I want a chance to reply to your talk, but your people don't understand my language. Will one of your braves translate for me?"

"I will!" responded a deep, guttural voice in English, and the Spotted Elk stepped forth from behind the warriors. The astonishment of Old Sol was visible on his features—on the hard muscles of his face that had not changed a whit when his fearful doom was revealed him.

"Mudhole, by thunder!" was the trapper's exclamation, as he looked upon the features of the Indian.

"Ugh! Mudhole once, now Spotted Elk, a chief of the Blackfeet," replied the savage.

"You'll do fur what I want. Will you tell these Injuns jist what I say?" asked the trapper.

"Yes," was the laconic response.

"Wal, then, jist open your ears," and then in a calm, quiet tone the old trapper commenced to abuse the whole Blackfoot nation. He told them that they were dogs who ran before the white man's tread; that they were cowards who feared to attack a foe unless ten to one; that he, single-handed, could defeat any ten warriors of the Blackfoot nation, and defied them to the test. All these bitter words the Spotted Elk repeated to his brethren, exactly as he had spoken them. A howl of anger from the enraged braves greeted the close of the trapper's remarks, and but for the personal interference of the White Wolf and other leading chiefs, the multitude would then and there have satisfied their rage and have saved the fearless man from the torture-stake.

The angry braves at last driven back and quieted, the trapper was carried to a stout oak tree, at the foot of which dried wood had been placed and all preparations made for the fire that was to be his death.

Held firm by a dozen or so of stout warriors, the trapper's arms were unbound; then he was placed with his back to the tree, and his wrists brought together behind it and lashed tightly with deer-skin thongs; then the thongs were removed from his feet, and his ankles lashed firmly to the tree, the thongs passing around it. The prisoner being firmly bound, the chiefs retired from him, seemingly for a brief deliberation before they applied the fire. One chief alone remained by the side of the doomed trapper; that chief was the Spotted Elk.

"Longlegs is in danger," said the chief, quietly, in English, while he was apparently busy examining if the lashings were secure.

"Death is looking me in the face, Mudhole," returned the trapper. "I guess the Blackfeet have got me this time."

"Does Longlegs remember when he took the wounded Indian to his lodge and cured his wounds?" asked the Spotted Elk.

"Yes," replied the trapper; "does the chief remember it?"

"If the beaver-catcher waits he will see. The Mudhole is now a great chief of the Blackfoot nation. When the White Wolf dies the Spotted Elk will be the chief of the tribe," said the Indian.

"And you are the Spotted Elk?" replied the trapper.

"Yes; the mud-turtle has become an eagle."

"Will the eagle remember the debts of the mud-turtle?" asked the trapper significantly.

"A chief has nothing but his word. When

he loses it, he loses all," sententiously replied the Indian, stalking away from the trapper.

Sol looked after the Indian, with a puzzled expression upon his face. He could not understand the nature of the savage. His words seemed to promise hope, but the time for help must come soon or not at all; hours were minutes now.

The oak to which the trapper was bound stood at the upper end of the village. Between it and the forest, in one direction, lay nothing but the Indian corral or horse-pound, which was, as the trapper could see by the light of the fire that blazed in front of the council-lodge, filled with horses. Ten paces from the prisoner stood the circle of chiefs; beyond them were congregated the rest of the village—the common warriors, the women and children—all anxious to behold the death of the famous beaver-catcher.

"Hyer they come!" cried the trapper, between his clenched teeth, as a brave advanced with a torch of blazing wood to fire the mass beneath the trapper's feet. "I'm in fur it now! No hope, no chance fur a squeeze fur life. My time has come an' I'll face the music like a man! The 'tarnal red skunks shan't say that the Giant Trapper squealed even when the fire were a-burnin' his innards out."

The warrior applied the blazing torch to the dry wood beneath the trapper's feet, then retired to the crowd to enjoy the agony of the dying white-skin.

The trapper could hear the crackling of the flames as the dry wood caught the fire; the smoke began to ascend and blind the eyes of the helpless prisoner.

Sol could already feel the heat of the burning wood, and in that, apparently the last hour of his life, the rough old trapper, the man of the woods and prairie, commended himself to his Maker.

Then, in his deadly peril, with the pale king of terrors staring him full in the face, he suddenly became conscious that the thongs that had bound his feet to the tree and his wrists together were loosened suddenly, and the handle of a knife was thrust into his hand. The trapper then understood the situation in a moment.

A hoarse voice whispered in his ear:

"Make for the corral—the gate is unfastened—turn the horses loose—you know the rest!"

The trapper knew the voice instantly; it was the voice of Mudhole, once the outcast warrior, now one of the great chiefs of the Blackfeet.

The trapper with a single glance took in the scene before him; then, with a terrific yell which rung like a peal of thunder on the ears of the astonished Indians, he leaped from the torture-stake, dashed through the flames before him, and, knife in hand, ran swiftly toward the corral. For a moment the Indians were paralyzed by the sudden movement of the prisoner; a moment they gazed upon the strange scene, and then, with cries of rage sprung forward to intercept the trapper.

If ever Longlegs ran swiftly, he did so now, for he was well aware that life was the prize at stake. On he went, exerting every muscle, heading for the corral. Though he had gained a few yards by the quickness of his start, and the surprise of the Indians, yet, as they were nearer in a direct line, to the corral, the objective point in this desperate race for life, the trapper had need of all his splendid powers.

As he ran he calculated the odds against him. On his left a single warrior was running, knife in hand, on a course that, gradually approaching the line on which the trapper was running, must, before he reached the corral, bring them together. That warrior was the White Wolf. On his right another Indian was close on his track, but from him the trapper did not expect harm as the chief was no other than the Spotted Elk; the rest of the Indians were fast falling behind, the terrific pace at which the flying man was running being too much for them.

A few rods more and he and White Wolf must inevitably come together.

"Either he or me," hissed the trapper, through his clenched teeth, as he grasped firmly the long scalping-knife put into his hand.

A yell of triumph burst from the pursuing Indians, as they beheld their chief gaining upon the white-skin.

A minute more and the trapper and the White Wolf came together. The Indian made a sweep with his knife at the white as he came up. Sol parried the blow with his left arm; the keen knife cut through the stout deer-skin into the flesh. On rushed the flying man, not attempting to return the blow. He had passed the chief, and the chance of fortune was in his favor, but fate again, for the second time, seemed against him, for one of the little Indian curs,

encouraged by the example of the chief, seized the trapper by the leg. With a terrific kick, Sol sent the cur yelping into the dust, but, by the motion, he lost headway, stumbled and fell upon his knee. The White Wolf, who was close upon his heels, raised his scalping-knife and aimed a death-blow at the fallen trapper.

A moment the knife glittered in the air, then it descended with terrible force, driven with all the strength of the savage's arm into the body of the—Spotted Elk, who had thrown himself forward to receive the blow intended for the trapper.

Thus the Indian kept his faith, and Mudhole paid the debt he owed to Old Sol.

The trapper regained his feet, and, with a motion as quick as a cat, drove his long knife to the heart of the White Wolf, who in vain attempted to parry the terrific stroke of the trapper's arm. With a hollow groan, the great chief of the Blackfeet, the famed warrior, White Wolf, sunk upon the earth, the blood streaming free from his wound. By his side lay the Spotted Elk—dead!

On again went the now hopeful man. The Indians in his rear had gained a little upon him, but they paused for a moment by the side of their dying chief, and then again, with cries of vengeance, pursued. Gaining the corral, Old Sol burst in upon the horses, yelling like a demon. The frightened steeds burst through the open gates upon the crowd of advancing Indians like a whirlwind, and the savages for a moment, were obliged to abandon the pursuit to save themselves from being trampled to death by the horses. The trapper profited by the confusion to swing himself upon the back of a roan-colored pony, and, guiding the animal by the deer-skin halter, plunged through an opening in the thicket, and rode furiously along the little path beyond.

With cries of rage the savages mounted in hot haste, and set off in chase of the flying foe, who had not only escaped the torture-stake but had slain their great chief.

On through the wood went the chase—the trapper riding for dear life and the savages following hard upon his track, guided by the noise of his horse's hoofs.

Five of the Indians, who were better mounted than the others, kept together in the advance. On they went, listening eagerly to the sound of the horse's hoofs before them. By that sound they could tell whether they were gaining upon the fugitive or losing ground. At first the trapper seemed to gain upon them; the sound of the hoofs grew fainter and fainter to their ears, then, to the joy of the Indians, the pace of the fugitive seemed to slacken, for the noise of the horse's gallop grew louder and louder; they were gaining upon the trapper fast. They urged their ponies to increased speed—now they caught sight of the steed, flying through the thicket openings; they were gaining rapidly upon the horseman. On they flew, riding like mad. At last they dashed alongside of the flying horse, to find that it was—riderless. The cunning trapper had slipped off the horse during the chase, concealed himself in the underbrush, and probably chuckled as the Indians rode madly by him, in pursuit of the affrighted horse.

The Indians held a council. When and where the trapper had left the horse and taken to the thicket they could not guess, and in the dense darkness of the night, scouting after the trail of such a cunning woodman was folly.

With heavy hearts they returned to the village, and told of the escape of the long-legged trapper.

The Blackfoot nation that night mourned over two great calamities; the death of their great chief and the escape of the beaver-catcher.

CHAPTER XII. LINKS IN A CHAIN.

THE White Bird, after the confusion attending the bearing of the white to the torture-stake, to leave the village. When she heard from the lips of the White Wolf the doom of the beaver-catcher, she knew she had no power to save him; her weak aid would avail him nothing; so, sorrowfully, she resolved not to behold his death, but to flee from the village, join her lover, and conduct him at once from the valley. Her keen womanly sense told her that the savages, busy with the torture of the helpless prisoner, would not seek for the rest of the whites until morning; by that time she hoped to be able to lead her lover and his friend far beyond the power of the Indians. She knew that Tall Thunder and his men were guarding the lower end of the valley, for she had questioned

one of the chiefs as to the whereabouts of the missing warriors. That fact troubled her but little, for she knew of a rocky pass by the "Bitter Stream," as it was called by the Blackfeet, through which she might conduct the whites, and thus evade the red pickets at the lower end of the valley.

The Indian girl gained the wood, and following a little path, came to the river. Down the river's bank she went with hasty steps, for time indeed was precious.

An hour later found her at the entrance of the little cave.

"Harry!" she called, softly, "'tis I, White Bird!"

Courtney, watching within the cave, knew well the voice, and, in an instant more, she was folded to her lover's heart.

Briefly she told of the surprise and capture of the trapper. Bitter was the sorrow of the two men, for they had learned to love the brave old man. Their sorrow could not save him, for, as the White Bird told them, by that time the guide was doubtless a corpse.

The White Bird proposed her plan of flight, to which both the whites agreed.

"When shall we attempt it?" asked Courtney.

"In an hour," replied the girl. "The night is growing clearer; the moon should rise soon and give us light."

"Poor Sol!" cried Courtney; "I shall never forget him."

"Nor I either," replied Wright. "I shall always blame myself as being the cause of his death, for, but for me, he would not have ventured into this wilderness."

And where was he whose untimely death they were at that moment deploring? Why, making his way through the forest toward the cave as fast as his long legs would carry him.

His idea in taking the horse from the Indian village had been to deceive the red-skins. He knew well how easy it would be to slip from the back of the animal, conceal himself in the bushes, and let the red warriors follow on the trail of the runaway beast. The cunning trick had been successful; the savages had been thrown off the trail, which they could not regain until the morning, and then not without difficulty.

"Now, then," cried the old trapper, communing with himself in his usual fashion, as he strode through the forest, with his long, tireless stride, "of the leetle gal has found the cave all right, an' is thar, we'll put for the settlements to on't. It won't do to tell her, though, that I settled the hash of the big chief; he may be a relation of hern."

Old Sol reached at last the little cave, and entered it much to the surprise of the inmates. His cheery voice had told them who it was.

"Sol!" cried Courtney. "Is it possible you are alive?"

"You bet!" was the hearty rejoinder.

"Why I saw you at the torture-stake," said the Indian girl.

"Sartin," replied the trapper, "but I didn't stay thar, thanks to Mudhole. He cut the thongs that bound me to the stake, put a knife into my hand, an' then I run a muck through the Injun village. It were a lively time for a few minutes, you bet! I reckon the Blackfeet won't forget the doin's of this night fur some years to come."

And the old trapper was right; for years after the events we have related, by the Blackfoot camp-fires, on the trail and on the hunt, the wonderful escape of the white-skinned beaver-catcher, who bore a charmed life, and the death of their great chief at his hands, was told by the old warriors to the young braves. Nor was the strange death of the Spotted Elk forgotten in the annals of his tribe. One and all believed him to be possessed with an evil spirit who caused him to give his own life to save the beaver-catcher.

Courtney detailed the plan of White Bird to escape from the valley. Old Sol nodded his head in approval.

"It will work, I reckon," he said; "the moon will soon be up, an' then we'll be goin'."

"Yes, we will bid farewell to this fatal valley forever," cried Courtney.

"But, how about the fifty-thousand-dollar treasure that you were goin' to git up in the Injun village?" questioned Sol.

"I think I shall leave that in your hands. You shall form a party and learn the truth."

"Jes' so!" cried the trapper. "That will suit me jist like shootin'!"

"White Bird," asked Courtney, "do you not feel sorry to leave your Indian home and go with us?"

"No," simply answered the girl.
"Will you not regret the step?" asked the lover, softly; his tone could only reach the girl's ear.

"No; I love you better than I do any thing in all the world. I have loved you from the first moment that I saw you in the settlement at Fort Benton. Do you not remember that I showed you my face there?"

"Yes," replied Courtney, "I do; the most beautiful face that I ever saw."

"Ah! you think so now; but, will you always think so?"

"Yes, while I live I shall love you. Have you not left home, friends and all for me?" cried Courtney. "Have you not saved my life? But for you I should be even now a prisoner in the hands of the Blackfeet."

"I do not think you would deceive me, and if you do, the poor White Bird can but die," replied the girl, sadly.

"While I live my life is pledged to you!" cried Courtney. "You have left home, friends, country, all for me, but you shall not regret them, for my love shall make amends for all."

And over the soul of the lovers crept the holy calm that pure love alone can bring. Young hearts were they that lived truly for each other.

"Then you will undertake the expedition that I spoke of?" Wright asked of the big trapper.

"You jist bet I will!" emphatically returned old Sol. "I calculate I kin wallop the hull Blackfoot nation either with fist, legs or head. I ain't much of a fightin' man; but, when you pen me into a corner, and say, 'fight or die,' you kin pretty generally reckon that it'll be 'fight.'"

"You shall lead the expedition to find the heir, and if you are successful you shall have one-half of the fifty thousand dollars," said Wright.

"What on airth could I do with so much money? I ain't got any use fur it," returned the trapper.

"Well, you shall fix your own terms," said Wright.

"Jes' so; couldn't be anything more squar'," replied the trapper; "but, s'pose I just ask the leetle gal over thar 'bout the critter we're arter."

"Do," said Wright; "we may learn something."

"Say, White Bird, I don't know as you know it, but we're arter somebody in your village."

"Yes," returned the Indian girl; "you seek a treasure in the village of the Blackfeet."

"True as preachin'!" said the trapper, "but as the Injuns somehow know of our plan, we've kinder made a failure."

"No," returned the girl, quietly, "you have succeeded."

The trapper stared at her with astonishment. Wright and Courtney also were puzzled at her words.

"I reckon you don't exactly understand me, leetle gal," said Sol. "You see, the fact is, beauty, we seek a treasure, as Misther Wright calls it, worth fifty thousand dollars."

"Yes, I know you seek what you call a treasure, but, how it can be worth that sum, I can't imagine. But, I again say, you will succeed." The girl spoke with calm assurance.

"Look hyer," said the old guide, not able to make head or tail of her words; "we're arter a leetle gal—"

"Yes, I am the girl!" said the White Bird.

"Thunder!" cried the trapper.

Wright and Courtney started in astonishment.

"Yes; I heard the White Wolf say in the white settlement that you sought me. You see I save you the trouble by coming," said the girl.

"But the girl we seek is white," said Wright.

"So am I. Taken from my parents by the Indians when a child; on my arm, in little blue characters, is my name."

"And that name is?" questioned Wright, eagerly.

"Della Curtis," replied the girl.

"Hooray!" cried the trapper, gleefully.

And then the story of her parents was told to the White Bird, and her simple history was heard by the three men who had risked their lives to rescue her from the savages.

The White Bird had not, until her return from Fort Benton, known that she was not of the blood of the Indians. Then one of the old squaws had revealed to her her history.

In an hour from the time that the trapper had entered the cave, the moon came slowly over the tree-tops.

The time had come for flight; so, through the

defile in the rocks, conducted by the White Bird—or, as we should call her, Della Curtis—went the little party.

At the little glade, on the Bitter Stream, where they had camped, they found—as the trapper had predicted—their horses, for the horses of Wright and Courtney had followed the example of the clay-colored animal of the big trapper, in remaining close to the spot where they had been left by their masters.

With the aid of the horses, the little party reached Fort Benton in safety and without seeing a single hostile savage.

At Fort Benton, Wright, Courtney and Della parted with their old guide and faithful friend, and took passage to St. Louis. In St. Louis Della easily proved her identity, took possession of her property, and then became the wife of Harry Courtney.

Wright received his fifty thousand dollars and settled down contentedly.

As for our long-legged friend, the shrewd beaver-catcher, he still traps in the North-west, and no man brings a larger or finer pack of peltries into Fort Benton than Ginger, familiarly called Sol, THE GIANT TRAPPER.

THE END.

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